

BARBARA LYNN

EMILY JENKINSON



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# BARBARA LYNN

A TALE OF THE DALES AND FELLS

BY

EMILY JENKINSON

AUTHOR OF "SILVERWOOL," "THE SOUL OF UNREST."

"An enduring soul have the Fates given unto men."—*Iliad*.

LONDON

EDWARD ARNOLD

1914

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# PART I





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# BARBARA LYNN

## PART I

### CHAPTER I

#### THE LONELY STEADING IN THE DALE

BARBARA LYNN looked up the dale.

Thundergay glimmered through the green twilight with his hoary head under the Pole star, and his feet in the wan waters of a tarn. His breath was the North wind.

Barbara put up the shutters and turned to an old woman, who was propped against the pillows of a four-post bed. It stood in the full light of a turf fire, and looked like a ship with its sails furled.

“I’ll bid you good-night and good rest, great-granny,” said the girl.

The old woman was watching her with keen eyes—eyes so bright that they glittered under her shaggy brows.

“Do you ever waken o’ nights?” she asked.

Barbara laughed and shook her head.

“Nay, I sleep from dark to dawn. But I’d hear



you, great-granny, if you called. I've ears like a mountain hare."

"Aye, aye, rest's for the young, restlessness for the old. I lie awake thinking o' the days gone by. But you've no memories worth minding yet, my lass. Wait till you're my age—ninety-six come Michaelmas."

Barbara placed a lighted candle on the bridewain close to the bed, and stood for a moment looking down at the eagle-eyed old woman.

The Potter had made the new vessel after the pattern of the old, but the spirit of life which each held was different. The girl and her great-grandmother had the same wide brows, the same well-chiselled nose, and their eyes were blue. Barbara was tall beyond the usual height of her sex, and she carried her body with the grace of one accustomed to stand on giddy heights and climb perilous places. Her head was finely moulded, and in proportion to her form. Peter Fleming, the miller's son, studying classics at Oxford, called her Athene, and said that a glance into her blue eyes, gave strength to his shoulders and courage to his heart. So had the old woman in the four-poster looked eighty years ago.

But though the eyes of both were blue, Barbara's were as mild and meditative, as Mistress Annas Lynn's were hard. They scanned each other narrowly. The marked difference as well as resemblance between them seemed to strike the old woman, for she suddenly said :

"You take after me in looks, lass, though your father and his father were the spitten picture of your great-grandfather, and Lucy favours them. But you are no more like me in temper than the beck in spate



is like the same beck on a calm summer's morning. At your age I had kenned the bride-bed, and the birth-bed, and o' but kenned the death-bed. But you're still a bairn, puzzling over your letters."

There was pride and scorn in her voice.

"It's true, great-granny," replied Barbara, who was slow of tongue. "I's mazed-like at the world."

"Hoots-toots," said the old woman testily. "There's nowt to maze thee. Take what's sent and make the best on it. Life was made to be lived, not questioned. And it's worth living. I tell thee so, Barbara, and thee can take my word for it—I's that old. Whiles it turns your mouth awry, but the sweet and the sour are fairly mixed. Lucy's learnt that much—I know by the light in her eye. She'll get more of real life out of one night, larking with the lads in Cringel Forest, than you out of a hundred nights star-gazing on Thundergay."

"M'appen you're right," answered the girl, "but who would see to the farm, the sheep, and the lambs, and the kye, if I spent my time larking with the lads?"

Mistress Lynn's expression changed quickly. A crafty look displaced the open scorn of her eyes.

"Aye, aye, keep to the sheep-paths, Barbara. Keep to the sheep-paths and your star-gazing. See thou keep to the sheep-paths, great-granddaughter. They're safer for a young lass than Cringel Forest. Get thee gone now. It's time you were in bed. The dawn comes earlier every day."

"Earlier still I'll have to be up," replied Barbara, giving the old woman good-night.

"God bless thee, Barbara, thee's a good lass, although I do get my knife into thee whiles. Sleep well."



The girl drew the blue and white homespun curtains round the bed, put out the candle and went away. The wooden soles of her clogs rang with a measured sound upon the stone stairs and then across the rafters overhead. After that there was silence save for the chatter of the beck, running by the door. Its voice had an insistent, familiar tone, as though it were talking to someone within. No movement came from old Mistress Lynn. Either she was asleep, or she busied her mind with thoughts of other days. For a long time the room was in darkness. Then the turf on the fire slipped, the light leaped forth, and the four-poster glided out of shadow like a ship in full sail. The curtains were noiselessly drawn back, and a long, lean hand relit the candle.

Mistress Lynn looked slowly and searchingly about her. She left no dim corner unscanned, and there were many dim corners in the great kitchen, for it ran the length of the front part of the house.

It was a low room with a flagged and sanded floor. The walls were white-washed, making a fine contrast to the beams overhead, and the doors of the carved oak cupboards, all alike, black with age. Along one side ran three windows. The hearth was a slab of blue slate, and, as the chimney flue descended no further into the room than the ceiling, the fire made a great show on occasions, with its flames and smoke ; as though one end of the house were burning from floor to rafters. A bar of wood, called the rannel-balk, spanned the fire-place, and from it depended the rattan-crook, a long hook on which the kettle hung. There was a carved oak settle in the ingle, and near it a spinning wheel ; and under the windows a narrow but heavy table with all its corners sharp



but one, which was rounded off in a curious manner following the shape of the solid tree trunk from which it had been made. Against the opposite wall stood a dresser, holding a varied array of wooden and pewter platters, piggins for drinking out of, and two or three china cups. Next to it came the bridewain, and then the great bed. Between the windows was the door, bound with iron, studded with large nails, and bolted by two massive iron bolts. Another door at the far end led into a little passage, which gave access to the wool-barn, cow-house and dairy, all at the back of the building. In the chimney, curing in the smoke, hung flitches of bacon and a sheep by the heels. Upon the shelves along the walls were hammers and lanterns, pattens for horses to wear in snowy weather, sticks and staves and an old gun. An oak cupboard, with Mistress Lynn's initials carved upon it, held the oat-cake, and a kist, near the fire, held meal.

But the principal feature of the place was the four-post bed, with its curtains of blue and white homespun, so placed that it commanded a full view of the room. Nothing could happen there unseen by the old woman.

Shadows shot up and sank with the flickering light. The clock peered down like a white-faced watcher, the dresser and the high-backed chairs were endowed with movement if not with life. Mistress Lynn laid her fingers upon the bridewain, as though she would reassure herself that it, too, was not a fantastic creation of firelight and shadow, but the solid piece of oak which she had brought with her to this house of Greystones, when she married David Lynn four generations ago.



She listened for any sound in the sleeping house. But all was quiet. No stealthy steps crossed the rafters overhead, where Barbara and Lucy slept. The windows were shuttered and the doors were closed. Jan Straw, the shepherd, grown old and blind and deaf in her service, had a bed along with the hind above the cow-house. There was none to spy upon her, save the shadows and the firelight, and the bob-tailed sheep-dog, lying with his nose between his paws, dreaming of the flocks upon Thundergay.

Mistress Lynn moved the candle nearer to her, and, taking from its hiding-place in the bed a large iron key, she leaned over and unlocked the middle cupboard of the bridewain.

The light was full upon her face, revealing the fine network of lines about mouth and eyes, the parchment-like texture of the skin, and the whiteness of the hair, that escaped from under her frilled night-cap. Hers was a face bearing the imprint of age in every lineament, and of an abiding craftiness, which all the greatness of her nature had not managed to efface.

The bridewain was apparently stocked with carded wool. This she pushed aside, however, and drawing out a bundle of silver spoons and a gold locket, she laid them on the bed. She counted the spoons one by one, and fingered the locket absently, as though the thoughts which it roused carried her mind back to some experience long past. The expression of her face changed from grim satisfaction to great weariness. Her lips moved, but the words were lost in the chatter of the beck.

When Mistress Lynn was a girl, over three-quarters



of a century ago, she had loved Joel Hart, a young gentleman of quality, whose home was not far off, and the locket had been a gift from him. But he married Mary Priestly, the heiress of Forest Hall, in Cringel Forest, and she married David Lynn, of Greystones. Neither marriage was very happy. Joel took part in the rebellion of 1745, and was shot, losing all his lands save the old house of Forest Hall, which his descendant owned and lived in at this time. But between the rebel's outlawry and his capture, what memories were crowded for the village girl he had once made love to ! She had hidden him from pursuit among the wool-sacks, unknown to her dour, loyal husband. The tale had once been a favourite one for a winter night's telling. But now it had ceased to rouse enthusiasm in the dale. Only to this old woman was it a vital memory.

She turned the locket over, then she dropped it, putting such melancholy thoughts as it drew forth resolutely away. She searched in the back of the bridewain and brought out some bags of blue linen, each one tied with a leather thong. They were full of money.

It was for the winking yellow coins which she poured into her lap, that Annas Lynn, at ninety-five, still found life worth living. She, the relic of a past age, with son and grandsons dead, and only two young girls left of all her kindred, whose heart had shrivelled with the death of Joel Hart long ago, still hoped that many years would pass before she was laid to sleep by the mouldering bones of her husband in the kirk-garth. She was proud of her age, proud of her right to be called great-grandmother, proud of her keen wits. She ruled the steading and the



flocks, and the ploughed lands, and the pastures with regal authority from her bed in the kitchen. No one disputed her sway. Lucy, younger than Barbara by a year, had been known to defy her ; but she rued her rashness in tears for many days afterwards. Neither her son, nor her grandsons, middle-aged men when they died, had ever opposed her will. She broke if she could not bend.

Mistress Lynn stooped over her money-bags. She counted the coins, letting them fall into her hand with a merry tinkle. She counted them below her breath, as though she were afraid to utter the toll of her wealth openly. She was a rich woman. The toil of years lay in her lap ; and Barbara's care of the lambs, Lucy's light hand with the butter, the faithful service of old Jan Straw still added many a sovereign to the pile. Gold ! gold ! it warmed the life blood that otherwise would have run cold at the fountain. To get richer was the ambition of this old woman. She set about compassing it with all the craft of a daughter of Jacob.

The sheep-dog heard the faint jingle, and, getting up, came sniffing to the bed-side. He buried his nose in the quilt, causing a coin to slip unnoticed upon the floor. Like all his kind he owed a willing obedience to a strong hand, and though he slunk in terror from his mistress's anger, he returned trustfully to eat the crumbs which she sometimes gave him.

She patted his head.

"There's no cream-cakes hid among the blankets, Toss, my lad," she said. "Get awa back, and take thy sleep."

The dog returned to his bed by the fire, but the



coin lay shining upon the sheepskin beside the four-poster. She did not miss it.

Midnight ; and the hour of twelve rang out, overcoming for a brief while the ceaseless chattering of the beck. Mistress Lynn put away her money-bags, and relocked the bridewain. She bent her head, listening intently, but to a clock striking twelve far back in her memory. On such a night as this, at the same hour, she had hidden Joel Hart among the wool-sacks, while David Lynn, Goodman, slept peacefully in his bed. That night summed up for Annas all the sweetness and bitterness of life. She had lived then to the utmost fibre of her being.

She drew the curtains and lay down. The four-poster once more took on its likeness to a ship in full sail.

But there was no rest for the old woman. She spent the night-time, as she had foretold to her great-granddaughter, thinking of the days gone by. During those cold, early hours, that drag so wearily for the wakeful, she lived again through many a wild scene. Yet she longed for sleep, and vainly tried to put the memories from her, which she would rather cast into oblivion for ever. Hers had been an eventful life.

She had been born and bred in this land of the dales and fells, under the shadow of Thundergay. Her looks and actions showed the blood from whence she came. She was a true descendant of those wild Northmen, who had once swooped down upon that countryside, and built their homesteads there. Tall, blue-eyed, and yellow-haired in her youth, she might have been Unn, the Deep-minded, come to life again out of her saga. About her breathed an air of mystery, for she was, in truth, no common woman, either in body or in mind.



She had married early, and made this farm of Greystones the very centre of her own personality. Husband and children had feared rather than loved her, and no one knew what depths of affection her nature held, save Joel Hart, dead seventy years ago. There was a Joel Hart now living at Forest Hall, the old house about a mile away down the dale, and upon him had fallen a pale reflection of her love. He and Barbara were the only beings for whom she felt any real regard, and this not for their own sakes, but because the one bore so striking a resemblance to his ill-fated ancestor and the other to herself. They were a reincarnation, in appearance, of the past.

As Mistress Lynn lay awake, she became acutely conscious of those other days. They lived again. At one moment she was helping to bar the doors against the last raid of the moss-troopers, while her husband shot at them with a flint-lock from an upper window. Then, in the twinkling of an eye, she was standing among the wool-sacks, her lantern making a round moon of light upon the wall opposite. Even yet she could not see a lantern's glow without the blood quickening through her veins.

Sleep would not come to her. She tried to draw her mind away from such scenes, and think of the quiet hills. She listened to the beck, singing under the windows. Its voice was so clear that it seemed to be running across the kitchen floor by her bed. But it would only sing of the past, like a bard telling tales of the strenuous days of old. It was a lullaby for heroes, not for a weary old woman who could not sleep. She lay, shut in by her curtains, with her eyes fixed wide, seeing faces and hearing voices long since gone into the spirit-world.



Outside, the moon was shining like a new silver crown. The fells lay white under its rays, for the snow had not yet melted from the uplands, though primroses were beginning to peep along sheltered spots of the beck-side. There was a touch of frost in the air, which gave a shimmer to the sky. The roof of Greystones glistened, and the five great sycamores, standing about the house, flung barred, black shadows across the sheep-pens that lay at the back of the farm, surrounded with one great wall ten feet high, built when robbers were frequent visitors. No other steading stood in the dale. The little village of High Fold lay two miles away, hidden by the trees of Cringel Forest. Behind Greystones the fell-side ran up at a steep angle to Mickle Crag. It was not a cheerful place. The fell-folk said that a curse had been laid upon it, but when, and by whom, and for what offence, no one had ever heard. Yet many believed that the house would one day fall, or the beetling black crags come down upon it, and then would end the family of the Lynns, who had lived there for three hundred years. Lucy laid crossed straws on the threshold, as her mother had done, and her mother's mother, and hung horseshoes over the doors, but the house still kept its melancholy air. The lonely situation of the place had much to do with this impression, for Boar-Dale was deep and wild and barren, surrounded by a mountain rampart, up which the sun must climb before it could send its kindly beams to dispel the mists that made it their home.

Barbara and Lucy, aided by the village folk, had tried to persuade Mistress Lynn to leave the house and have another built in a more cheerful spot, but she would not listen to them. Had she not lived



there for more than seventy years ? Nothing had ever happened. There had been landslips, to be sure, upon the fells behind, but they had never fallen anywhere near the house. The beck was flooded every winter, but never got higher than the bottom step of the garden. What was there to fear ? No ; when she left Greystones, abandoned it to the bats and the owls, it would be when she was carried out with her feet up. Then Barbara and Lucy could do as they liked.

Mistress Lynn had been bedridden for several years. She had slipped in the yard one muddy day and injured her ankle. It had recovered sufficiently for her to have hobbled about with the help of a stick, but the proud old woman could not brook such an idea. She would not be seen hirpling like a sheep with the louping-ill, and so she preferred to remain in bed and keep her dignity. She was quite happy and fully occupied in holding her iron sceptre over her little family, and never gave a thought to the curse. But Barbara and Lucy sometimes awoke at night and shuddered, for they knew that the scarred and broken face of Mickle Crag was peering down upon the roof with a malignant grin.

The moon set, and, in the grey dawn the old woman fell asleep. It was then that the birds began to twitter in the copse hard by, through which the beck babbled when it had run by the door. At the first low whistle of a blackbird, Barbara awoke.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SISTERS

LUCY was still lying fast asleep in bed. Barbara called softly, "Lucy, Lucy," but there was no reply. Then she laid her hand upon the sleeper's breast. Some hands have a power to thrill the spirit of those they touch. Such power had Barbara Lynn's.

Lucy stirred. She opened her eyes, and saw her sister bending over her, with hair unbound and glistening like a misty golden cloud.

"If I were on my death-bed," she murmured, "I should be fancying thee an angel out of heaven."

Barbara smiled slowly.

"It's time you were waking," she replied, and began to gather up her long locks, pleating them round her head.

Lucy flung back the coverlet, and drew her knees up to her chin.

"You've a black, black heart, Barbara Lynn, though you've the face of a holy saint," she replied. "I believe you get a lot of pleasure out of waking me up in the morning. I was dreaming such heavenly dreams—all about grapes!"

She shook back her hair, which was black and glossy as a raven's wing, but her eyes, like Barbara's,



were blue. All her movements were swift and decisive, for her spirit was made of quicksilver.

“You’ve an earthly mind,” she added.

Barbara knotted a kerchief round her head, and glanced at a tiny mirror hanging on the wall. A flickering rushlight vied with the grey dawn to show the face reflected there. She sighed audibly.

“You’re about right,” she said. “I think it’s clod-bound.”

Lucy drew a curl between her lips, meditating upon her sister’s reply.

“Where are you going?” she asked; “to Ketel’s Parlour?”

“Not just now. I promised to help the hind with a rough bit of ploughing—that high field where we are going to plant potatoes. It’s too steep for old Jan Straw to lead the horses there. He fell down yesterday! Poor Jan! he’ll never work no more.”

The sisters were silent as they thought of the old man, hardly so intelligent as the wild creatures of the woods and fells, but faithful to the last drop of his blood.

“I think he’ll be glad to die,” said Lucy.

A faint flush swept up Barbara’s face.

“He’s dust,” she replied, “and he’s going back to the dust he came from, like a little cloud raised by the wind. What has he ever had in life to make him want to live?”

Lucy sank back upon her pillows, and clasped her hands behind her head. It was not often that Barbara spoke bitterly.

“And you!” she said. “You’ve never a chance, either. You might be a man for the work you do.”

“I was meant for a man when I was made so tall

and strong," answered the girl, with a note of pride in her voice and a straightening of her figure.

"Nay, nay, there's not a man in the dale, nor in the country round, that can hold a candle to thee."

"Then I's neither fish, flesh nor fowl, for there's not a woman as tall or strong, unless it be yon great creature we saw at the show."

Lucy gazed at her sister with critical eyes.

"You'll look finely, like a queen, when you get the crown Old Camomile promised thee, the day he told your stars," she said.

Barbara moved towards the door, carrying her clogs in her hand.

"Don't forget it's time you were up," she replied. Not even to her sister would she acknowledge that the prophecy gave an interest to her life.

But Lucy would not be repressed.

"Perhaps a lord will ride by some day, and marry you, Barbara. Who knows?"

The girl paused with her fingers on the latch.

"His horse would stick in the mud of the bridle path like a fly in a glue-pot. He'd never get so far as Greystones. You're a silly wench, Lucy. Lords don't come looking for wives among peasant lasses."

Lucy gurgled with laughter, which she stifled under the quilt for fear of waking her great-grandmother.

"What a sober old maid you are, Barbara," she said. "Do you never dream?"

The door shut with a soft snick—her sister had gone.

For a while longer Lucy lay still, gazing at the rushlight as it burnt dimmer and the daylight increased. She wondered what life held in store for Barbara and herself. The present was not without



its excitements, but towards the future she turned longing eyes—the Future, hidden by a golden cloud, which some day would fade away, disclosing undreamed-of joys.

Then she got slowly out of bed. Her toilet was not a simple affair like her sister's. Along a shelf stood a row of little green jars and bottles, containing balms and salves and scented waters. The sun might tan Barbara's face and bleach her hair to the colour of ripe corn; rain and wind and frost might redden and cut her hands, but Lucy's cheeks were always satin smooth, and her curls black and glistening. She tempted her sister with ointment made from cowslips, with distilled rose-water, and balm of elderflowers—all the sweetest odours that ever perfumed woodland air were concentrated into those green phials—but she tempted in vain. Barbara laughed. There were the cows to milk, the sheep to herd, hoeing and weeding and seed-sowing to do; what time had she for such fanglements?

The eastern clouds were rosy with the rays of the rising sun when Lucy stole downstairs and opened the kitchen door. The four-poster stood with its curtains closed like an Arab's tent in lonely gloom. The girl shivered as she looked at it. The thought of the old woman lying within took all the brightness from her eyes and the lightness from her step. She was afraid of her great-grandmother as of something unknown. What right had anyone so old to be still among the living? Her place was with the dead, with the men and women whose names had become a faint memory in the dale, but who were to her personalities, that she had touched and handled. Lucy's mother had died when she was a baby, and



the grim old figure, that sometimes rocked her cradle, had filled her infant mind with fear. Now that she had grown to womanhood the fear remained, though she hid it under a gay and careless demeanour. Still, the shadow of her great-grandmother fell like a blight on Lucy's life.

She tiptoed to the fireplace and soon had the smouldering turf in a glow. Then, opening the outer door and stepping out into the sunlight, she filled the kettle at the spring. It was a fair morning. The chorus of birds had ceased and busy feathered things were marketing among the sprouting green of the beck-side. Far away up the dale she saw the red cows move, and knew that Barbara was somewhere near, driving them to new pastures. Thundergay was still swathed with smokelike mists, rolling upwards in the breeze, and gradually disclosing grey precipices, and slatey scree, with here and there patches of emerald, where the young ferns were beginning to spring, and higher up, wide fields of snow. Lucy paused to pluck a cluster of primroses, and place them in her hair. But she was startled by a cough from a stunted tree near. Among its knarled roots crouched a little figure, wrapped in a sack to keep itself warm.

"Oh, it's you, Jan!" said Lucy. "I thought you were a sheep coughing. You should have stayed in bed to-day and taken a rest."

The creature raised a pair of watery eyes to her face, then dropped them.

"I's always gotten up at dawn," was the reply.

"But it's so cold!"

Again the pale eyes were raised and dropped.

"Verra cold, lass."

"You must come to the kitchen."



“Nay.”

Lucy laid her fingers upon his withered hand.

“Come and get warm,” she entreated. “I’ve got such a grand fire burning.”

The old man made no reply, but kept his gaze upon her slender fingers. At last his voice came slowly, as though he were drawing up something from the dark well of his memory.

“Onced I seed a hand like yourn, onced, long ago. I’s forgotten when, but I minds the hand.”

“Come,” said Lucy.

He rose painfully and crawled by her side. But at the kitchen door he held back.

“Nay,” he repeated.

“Why?”

“I must work.”

“Rubbish,” said Lucy scornfully, and again she laid her hand upon his. “You’ve been working all your life, you can have a rest now. Let the new hind—Tom, do what’s to be done.”

The old man stared anew at her fingers.

“I minds where I saw that hand,” he said, “it was outside a white winding sheet . . . long ago.”

Lucy tried to draw him into the kitchen, but he was obstinate, and afraid of Mistress Lynn.

“I’ll go and feed the chickens,” he mumbled, and shuffled away round the end of the house.

Lucy looked after him sadly, then returned to her work. As she was shaking the sheepskin rug a coin fell out of it and lay glittering upon the ground. Picking it up with an exclamation of surprise, she turned it over and over. It was a sovereign. For some minutes she stood with her brows knit and her blue eyes darkening as thought took shape. The coin was

her great-grandmother's, there could be no doubt of it. Lucy had always had suspicions about the locked cupboard of the bridewain, which she had never seen opened. Now she knew something was hidden there—money most likely, perhaps many more coins like the one she had found, perhaps bags of them. If one could be lost without a hue and cry being raised for it, they must be as plentiful as blackberries.

What should she do? Should she keep it? Was it not her due, considering the way she worked and yet received no recompense? The temptation to put the coin in her pocket was strong, and she thought longingly of the many pretty things it would buy. Then she spurned the suggestion. She remembered Jan Straw, whose life had been bought for a few pounds and a sup of porridge; she saw Barbara wearing out her strong young life upon the fells; she thought of herself, drudging from daylight to day-darkening. The bitterness of it set her teeth on edge. She looked again at the yellow coin, and it seemed to have taken upon it a tinge of blood.

Then the curtain rings of the bed jingled, and turning round, she saw that her great-grandmother was sitting up, looking at her.

Lucy might fear the old woman, but she was not lacking in courage when the moment called for it. She balanced the coin upon her thumb-nail, spun it into the air, and caught it as it fell.

“See what I’ve found,” she said.

Mistress Lynn stared at the shining thing, lying on the girl’s palm.

“Where didst get it?” she asked sharply.

“At the end of the rainbow.”

“Rainbow! fiddlesticks! Give it to me.”



Lucy dropped the coin into the outstretched hand without a word. But she stood looking down, her eyes fierce and more like the old woman's than Barbara's were, although in face and figure there was no other resemblance.

"Where didst get it?" again asked Mistress Lynn.

"It fell out of the rug."

"Ah! I sold some sheep to a man from the South yesterday. I thought he had paid me short money—they're such cheats in the South! Well, well, it must have dropped out of his hand. Thee shall have a shilling come Good Friday, Lucy."

"A shilling!" Lucy was scornful, "a shilling!"

Mistress Lynn looked narrowly at her great-granddaughter. Between the girl and her little love was lost.

"What ails thee at a shilling? It's over much when I come to think of it. Thee shall have sixpence. That's enough for a young lass to spend on fallals."

"I wonder at you, I wonder at you, great-grandmother," exclaimed Lucy. "I wonder at you hoarding up the money, and you so old."

"Wouldst like to see me play ducks and drakes with it in the beck?"

Lucy tossed her head impatiently.

"Why do you keep Barbara and me penniless?" she asked.

"I feed you well and clothe you warm—what more dost need?"

"Barbara," began Lucy, but the old woman interrupted her.

"What's Barbara complaining about?"

"Barbara never complains. But I know she's heart-sick for something better than a lone life on the fells."

“If she’s sweethearting,” said Mistress Lynn, “if she’s taken up with a lad, I’s nought to say against it,” for the old woman thought that the services of a young strong man would be of great value now that Jan Straw was past work.

“Sweethearting!” replied Lucy. “It’s learning Barbara’s after!”

“Learning! Hasn’t she enough learning for any lass, and more than most? Doesn’t she ken the lift like the palm of her hand, and the dales and fells better than her ten toes?”

“It’s book-learning Barbara wants.”

“Book-learning! I don’t hold with book-learning. Hark to me, great-granddaughter. You’ll be a good lass, and when I’s gone there’ll be a nice little sum put by for you and your sister. Now, see to your work; the porridge is burning,” and the old woman sniffed the air disdainfully.

“Oh,” said Lucy, with a shrug of her shoulders, “Mickle Craggs will have buried us all by then—you and me and Barbara and the money, all in one grave.”

“Hold thy tongue,” replied the old woman calmly, but with such an edge to her words that Lucy kept her peace.

Later in the day Lucy went up the dale to find Barbara. She eagerly drank in the sunlight. It comforted her like a cup of sweet wine. From the mosses of the beck-side, where she followed the cattle road, a whispering could be heard as of life—innumerable, and infinitesimal—waking to activity after its long winter sleep. Bees were buzzing; birds were mating; the village geese, in charge of a goose-girl, were being driven to their feeding grounds; Tom, the



new hind, with a boy to drive the horses, was ploughing in a steep field ; and Jan Straw was gathering rushes. Everything was up and active.

The dale in which Greystones was situated wound into the heart of Thundergay. On the right rose Nab Head—a grey bastion streaked with little streams trickling from the melting snows, and now all aglitter in the sun. On the left, gloomy as its name, hung Darkling Crag. The dale lay between like a green lizard, basking in the warm light. It was green with marsh-mosses, and soon would be yellow with king-cups. Lucy sang to herself as she climbed upward :

“ Oh ! have you found my golden ball ?  
And have you come to set me free ?  
Or have you come to see me hanging  
On the gallows tree ? ”

There was no smile upon her face, but her eyes were wistful. She was hoping that Joel Hart would soon find a golden ball and come to set her free, before Greystones, and the tyrannical old woman there, had robbed her life of its youth and sweetness. She was just twenty, and panting to spread her wings and fly away. She turned round to look at her home.

It was the most solitary of habitations. About it hung an atmosphere of old forgotten things. It had a tragic air as though its past, by some strange process, were still in being. Even on a golden afternoon such as this, it could not exorcise the grey spirit that haunted it—the spirit of the ancient grey stones of which it was built. The slates were green with moss : the drip-stone was feathered with weeds which, before long, would belt it with a flowery garland : soon the great sycamores would burst into leaf ; but even then the house would keep its gloom. It was a fitting



habitation for Mistress Annas Lynn, who was nearly a hundred years old.

Lucy turned her eyes away from it, and looked at the mountain at the head of the dale, down whose sides the streams slid in thin white lines to fall with many a rainbow cascade into Swirtle Tarn, lying at its feet, blue as a violet. Thundergay dominated the dale. Its jagged peaks soared high above the fells around. It was the birth-place of eagles, mists and storms ; and it was also the nurse of her sister Barbara.

Her mind turned to Barbara.

If Lucy ever visualised such abstract ideas as goodness, integrity, and justice, she saw them under the living form of her sister. Joel Hart she loved ; Barbara she worshipped. With Joel she stood on an equality—he was as humanly imperfect as she—but Barbara stood on a mountain height, a great, grand figure, with a great, grand heart, sublime in her magnanimity, immovable as granite among the storms of her world.

She felt, too, that it was among the mountains that Barbara found her secret inspiration and strength. Since childhood she had spent the greater part of her life upon Thundergay, and, though it had been a rough nurse, beating her with winds like scorpions, training her by hunger and cold and weariness, yet she loved it still, but it had made her silent.

Lucy did not put her thought into these words, but she felt them, nevertheless.

She now left the cattle road, and followed a sheep-track round Swirtle Tarn. A shoulder of Thundergay seemed to block her way, but the track wound in and out of knowes and hollows, and led her at last through a gap, where she looked down upon a scene of pastoral beauty. A lawn of velvet grass lay by the margin



of the tarn, dotted with sheep and a few lambs—the firstlings of the flock. It sloped gently upwards, and surged like a full green tide against the bases of the cliffs. Here was a cave, called for generations Ketel's Parlour, in memory of some Northern robber who had made it his eyrie. Now Barbara claimed it, and often slept there when her work kept her abroad at night. The flocks were her especial care, and she “shepherded and improved the same according to the due course of good shepherding,” as the old title-deeds of Grey-stones recommended.

Lucy looked in. By the threshold her sister lay fast asleep, her long limbs sunk in repose upon a bed of straw. Her head was near the entrance, and the sun, as it got lower, flowed in golden ripples across the threshold. When it touched her eyes she would awake, for the sun was her clock by day, as the Great Bear was her clock by night.

Lucy did not speak, but took her knitting from her pocket, and sat down on a rock to wait.

The cave had been partly built up long, long ago, and two narrow slits of windows made in the artificial wall. The rusty remains of iron bolts and hinges showed that a door had once closed the entrance. A huge slab of slate lay across the threshold, and underneath it a little spring that babbled out of the floor of the cave disappeared, appearing again some few yards further down the slope.

It was not long before Barbara awoke. The sun was sinking; the tarn lay in shadow, blue as steel and glassy as a mirror; now and then a heron struck an evanescent star from the shallows where it splashed. But the fell-side still stood full in the vivid light, and was dyed to a rich green, like the colour seen on old



silken needlework. Upon Barbara, standing at the mouth of the cave, the sunshine seemed to concentrate. She looked larger and grander and more remote than a simple human being. She might be an incarnation of some Nature-power, older than the mountains around her, unassailed by time, and partaking of the perpetual youth of immortals.

“One of the ewes has died,” she said to Lucy, “and I’ve spent hours trying to get its lamb fostered. Like enough thee’ll have to take it home, and bring it up by hand.”

“Botherment ! ” exclaimed her sister ; “ haven’t I plenty to do already ? ”

Barbara made no reply. She was wondering what it felt like to be dead, wondering what that strange thing was which came but once, but came to all living, to men and women and sheep, and, in the twinkling of an eye, sent them out of the Known into the Unknown, where all mysteries might abound.

“Hast ever thought, Lucy,” she said at last, “how strange it is that we should die like sheep and sheep like us ? ”

“Not I ! ” replied the younger girl. “My head’s stuffed with lighter rubbish,” and she shuddered as her eyes fell upon a huddled white heap under a thorn

“It mazes me,” continued Barbara, “when I think that yon poor creature I’ve thought so silly mappen knows more than I do now. Death must be a queer waking, Lucy. It’s likely we’ll find that we’re very different to what we fancied we were. It’s likely we’re not the only things with souls. It’s likely that the world wasn’t just made for us, and all the creatures for our use. Old Camomile says that every blade of grass has its own little green soul, and loves



the wind and the sunshine and the rain, and has its ideas about the sky and the stars. Mappen it puts us down as girt senseless creatures, too coarse-minded to understand its thoughts."

"Old Camomile is getting old," said Lucy. "He havers a lot."

Barbara was silent. She rarely spoke because she rarely found anyone to understand her, save the old man Timothy Hadwin, called by the villagers Old Camomile, because he made potions, and electuaries, and essences, curing their aches and pains as if by magic.

Lucy rolled up her wool, put the ball in her pocket, and looked slowly round.

"It's a lonely-like place to spend the night," she said. "I wonder you're not afraid."

"Sometimes I am," replied Barbara. She recalled nights when she had trembled before the vastness of the hills, when the winds had deafened her with stories of things she could not comprehend, when she had turned from gazing at the cold light of the stars with a fear at her heart, because they would answer nothing to all her questions.

Barbara was not educated as the world counts education. It is true that she knew the fells and dales, the tarns and meres of her native country, as well as the oldest shepherd, who had spent his long life among them. She could tell the names of the constellations, and take her direction upon the darkling moors from them. She knew when to plough and sow and reap. No one was so weather-wise as she in the village. But this is not education in the eyes of the world, and Barbara set little value upon her knowledge. She could not speak the King's English,



though she spoke something much more picturesque and vigorous ; she only read the simplest books ; and wrote an ungainly, but characteristic hand. She knew no history, but her mind was furnished with a collection of tales and legends, which held more of the inner truth of history than the bare facts. Yet she longed with all her ardent nature for the learning contained in books ; for the power to grasp the thoughts that flashed across her mind and left upon it an impression as of a great flying light, which, if it had not eluded her, would have illumined her whole being. She pined for the life of the intellect.

“ I wish we could get out of our bodies,” said she, breaking the long silence. “ I wish we could shake them off like an old shift, and leave them here on the grass, while our souls sailed in the air naked-free.”

“ What a horrid idea ! ” said Lucy, shrugging her shoulders.

“ But our bodies are so earthy—always wanting meat and drink, and crying out for sleep. They throw a shadow on us, like a great rock blocking the light o’ the sun.”

“ I know nought about it,” answered Lucy, carelessly.

Barbara laughed at the puzzle of her own thoughts.

“ I know nought either,” she said ; “ yet something in me would like to win out if it could.”

Lucy went up the sheep-path. On the brow of the knoll she paused, looking back. Barbara was kindling a fire outside the cave, and the smoke, as it coiled upwards, hung between them like a blue veil. Her sister seemed to be moving among mysterious things, and there was symbolical meaning in the blue veil. For two worlds lie side by side, the material and the spiritual, and from either the view into the



other seems hazy and unreal. But the greatest intellects try to reconcile them. Towards such a reconciliation Barbara, in her untutored mind, was striving.

The sun had gone down, and, though the sky was still flushed with red and yellow, a subdued light and solemn stillness filled the dale—a stillness made the more impressive by the distant splashing of waterfalls and the calling of birds by the tarn.

Lucy felt sad. She had dropped over the knoll with a sigh. Barbara had listened to her story of the gold coin, and dismissed it without comment. She had not been impressed by the idea of their great-grandmother's hidden wealth. She had suggested no way of making life easier or pleasanter. Instead, her mind was possessed by vague ideas and strange questionings, which her sister could not understand, and which had no bearing upon their everyday life. Lucy went home in the waning light with reluctant feet.

But she was mistaken about Barbara's interest. For her sister had long known of the secret hoard, and had once remonstrated with the old woman about saving it in this way. But it had been in vain, as everything was in vain which opposed the will of Mistress Annas Lynn. The failure of the attempt had only served to strengthen the patience of her generous nature—the patience which can school itself to wait for the fulfilment of its desires, and, if need be, to receive without a murmur their denial. No shadow of a quarrel ever dimmed Barbara's outgoings or comings in ; her intercourse with her ancient kinswoman was serene and reverent, and she would not hazard it in an attempt that could only result

in an upheaval of the bitterest passion. Barbara then put the matter from her. In this she was different to Lucy, who could not cease to think and wonder and debate even after she had made up her mind.



## CHAPTER III

PETER FLEMING

THE swift night came down ; fells and dales were folded in purple gloom. Stars began to shine, and Barbara, eating her supper of coarse bread, let her eyes wander from group to group with meditative enjoyment. To her the sky was no vast abyss dotted with a formless multitude of shining points, but a field of wonderful fiery things, each following its own appointed course. Yonder glittered Leo, there swung the Great Bear and the Dragon ; and, there on a mountain peak, shimmered the Northern Crown. It led her thoughts to Timothy Hadwin's prophecy, when he cast her horoscope ; for she should wear a crown, he said, and though Barbara was too wise to put a strict construction upon his words, nevertheless, she found pleasure and inspiration in them, wondering what they might mean.

She flung an extra armful of wood upon the fire, for the night air nipped frostily. Then, taking her lantern, she went among the sheep to see that all was well with them and their lambs. The little orphan had been adopted, and nestled with its foster-brother against a warm woolly side. A sense of placid well-being lay over the fold, so the girl returned to the fire. As she sat in silence, her fingers busy making a

withy basket, and her mind active, there came from over the tarn a sudden burst of melody, ethereal as elfin music. It was echoed to and fro from cliff to cliff, now it danced overhead, then it stole like a whisper out of a dale far away. The shores of the tarn were ringed with sounds, so haunting that they seemed to be unearthly. Barbara listened in amazement.

Someone was playing a flute from the Rock of the Seven Echoes.

Again the music came rippling across the water and was tossed about from hillside to hillside in airy phantasy. When at last it died into silence, Barbara became conscious of the other sounds of the night—the tinkling of distant waterfalls, the cropping of a sheep close by. She listened expectantly, but the sounds were not repeated.

“It must be Peter,” she thought, “only Peter plays the flute hereaway, except Jake, the ratter, and only Peter would play it at such a place.”

Her eyes brightened when she thought that he was back again in the dale. Between him and the sisters lay a good fellowship. Often he spent hours with Barbara among the sheep, reading to her stories of old combats and great doings from the Iliad and Odyssey. But he was equally at ease when he helped Lucy to top and tail gooseberries, or sought among the bracken for the nest of the laying-away hen.

Barbara stirred her fire to a brighter glow. She knew that he would see it on the other side of the tarn, and perhaps he might come round to the cave and greet her after his long absence.

Peter was the only son of John Fleming, the miller—called Dusty John in the village—who was a man of



some substance, plain habits and little education. But he gave his son every advantage. The boy was sent to school, and afterwards, proving himself apt beyond expectation, went to St. Bees, from which ancient seat of learning he won a scholarship to Oxford. The miller's ambition was to see his son in the church, where he did not doubt Peter would soon be promoted to the highest office. In dreams he beheld him Archbishop of York or Canterbury. But the lad said neither yea nor nay to his father's wishes. He enjoyed himself to the full, coming home for vacations with a light heart, accepting the truckle bed in the mill-house and the homely fare with as lively a humour as he did the varied life of Oxford.

He reached the cave just as the moon was rising, and leaned his back against the cliffs to watch the light sparkle on the water.

"When did you get home?" asked Barbara, putting her withies aside, and bringing him a cup of milk.

He laughed.

"I've not got home yet," he said, "for I left the coach early in the afternoon to come over the tops. But they were too deep in snow, so I had to take the Girdlestone Pass instead. I stayed at the Shepherd's Rest for an hour. Now here I am, late as usual."

Then he plied her with eager questions about his father and mother, the village folk, and the welfare of all at Greystones.

"How goes the studying, Barbara?" he asked. "Have you read the book I sent you?"

She shook her head.

"Nay; it's not that I haven't the will, but there's no time. Jan Straw is grown so old, and the new hind hasn't got into the way of things yet, so that



the heavy end falls on me.” Then she added with a smile, “There’s such a lot of me to get tired, Peter.”

He looked at her. Though he could not see the calm eyes and the corn-coloured hair, the outlines of her form were splendid in the silvery light. He felt dwarfed beside her, not physically, but morally. Hers was the finer spirit. He acknowledged it with a glow of generous feeling, for he was given to hero-worshipping.

“We’ll make a pact, Barbara,” he said, “while I’m at home I’ll shepherd the sheep, and you shall read.”

“You are good and kind, Peter,” replied she, “but I remember how you helped me once before. If it wasn’t a rainbow, it was a flower, and if it wasn’t a flower, it was a bird, but never the sheep-salving or the cattle-herding. The kye got into the barley-field—do you mind?”

They both laughed.

“What a careless brute I am to be sure,” said he. “But if you won’t let me look after the farm, I’ll come and read to you, when you have time to listen. I’ve brought you a new book; you’ll like it.”

He unstrapped the pack he carried, and took out a stout volume. In the light of the fire he showed it to her. It was Pope’s Homer.

“Some warm day,” he continued, “we’ll sit on the fellside and wake again echoes of great deeds, and old battles. Thundergay shall be Olympus, and you shall be Athene, the azure-eyed maid. Listen to this——”

He bent down by the fire and held the book so that he could read by its light.

“ ‘Now heaven’s dread arms her mighty limbs invest,  
Jove’s cuirass blazes on her ample breast. . . .’ ”



“ I can see you in them, Barbara.”

‘ The massy golden helm she next assumes,  
That dreadful nods with four o’er shading plumes ;  
So vast, the broad circumference contains  
A hundred battles on a hundred plains.  
The goddess thus the imperial car ascends ;  
Shook by her arm the mighty javelin bends,  
Ponderous and huge ; that when her fury burns,  
Proud tyrants humbles, and whole hosts o’erturns.’ ”

He closed the book and put it into the girl’s hands.

“ I’ve never seen you roused up to do battle,” he laughed, “ but you’ll look like that when the spirit moves you. Good-night, Barbara.”

Something stirred her like the call of a trumpet heard by her spiritual ears alone. Was her placid life upon the mountains going to end ? Would she have to fight with her desires, because Duty still pointed a stern finger towards the sheep-paths, while another road opened before her—a broad and pleasant road. Peter always roused this restlessness in her heart. She was glad, yet sorry, when he went singing home, leaving her to the night-loneliness with her book of old battles.

The next morning Peter Fleming was walking up and down the cobbled path of the mill-garden between flowering currant bushes, and sheaves of lent-lilies, whose buds were still encased in their pale-green sheaths. Everything sparkled in a sudden burst of sunshine. From the mill-wheel the water fell like a glittering fringe, and the beck raced merrily by, clutching at the weeds and grasses on its rim, and drawing them down to make them gorgeously green under its clear surface. On the other side of the stream stood Cringel Forest.

The mill-house was a tall building with the date,



1600, carved over the door under a coat of arms of a wheat-sheaf and a sickle. The Flemings, or De Flemings, as they were then called—had been millers in the dale since the reign of Elizabeth, a fact which Dusty John prided himself upon, although he was as simple an old man as ever spoke the vernacular.

The kitchen door was open at the end of the cobbled path, and in its hot and sunny atmosphere, Peter's mother stood ironing. Her muslin kerchief—as fine as ever came from the looms of the East India Company—her gown of russet, and white apron were the essence of cleanliness and order.

“Get away with thy blandishments,” she said, for Peter had paused on the threshold to tell her that she looked like a ripe hazel-nut, her face was so brown and rosy and round. “Thee'd witch the wisdom out of my old head with thy flattery. And as for thy dadda—he cannot walk for swaggering, thee's lillied him up so handsome !”

She smiled proudly into the clear-eyed face looking so affectionately into her own. Peter made her feel that she was still young and worthy of admiration. When he came home she always wore white stockings—though she thought them an extravagance at other times—and placed a flower or a bow of ribbon under her chin.

She held up a kerchief that she was ironing, and said tenderly :

“It will be a great day for thy father and me when we see thee consecrated, Peter.”

He stepped across the floor where the sunshine lay in a broad band, and kissed her.

“And a blessed day when I does up thy lawn sleeves, my son. Thee must never let anyone do up thy



sleeves but me, lad, not even thy wife when thee gets one. There's nobody kens the art of clear starching and ironing better than thy old mother."

The young man sat on the edge of the table and swung his legs.

"You'll be disappointed, mother," he said, "but I never can see myself—in spite of your dear visions—in bishop's sleeves. I'm a lazy beggar, and more likely to be lying under a tree, finding sermons in stones and books in the running brooks than beating the pulpit cushions of Durham or Carlisle."

She shook her head indulgently.

"Time enough, time enough," she said. "Thee's too young yet to know thy own mind."

Peter looked round the kitchen and laughed.

"Would you like to live in a palace, mother?" he asked.

"A palace! And what would I do there?" she replied, seeing no further than the lawn sleeves which she would wash and iron.

The kitchen of the mill-house was small, clean and simple. Brass fire-irons, two or three candlesticks, a burnished copper warming-pan reflected the strong sunshine, but otherwise the puritanical severity of the white-washed walls was unrelieved. The floor was strewn with river sand, and the chairs and dresser glistened with constant oiling and rubbing. On the dresser was a pile of newly-made clap-cakes, and round the fire stood an oak maiden hung with clean linen. The place had a kindly, homely smell, and Peter sniffed it with enjoyment. He loved the towers of Oxford, and the shadow of his college cloisters, but this small and sunlit kitchen, where his mother baked and ironed, and his father smoked his evening pipe,



brought him back to those primitive passions of man out of which the strength of his life springs.

Peter returned to the garden and continued his walk up and down the cobbled path.

He was thinking of his future, and wondering what he would be able to make of it. He had almost decided that he would not take orders when his college days were done, which would be at the summer vacation. The prospect of becoming a curate, or even a North Country vicar did not attract him; on the other hand, he had no particular leanings in any other direction. That which would have suited him down to the ground, he sometimes told himself whimsically, was the position of a country gentleman, with a good library, a well-stocked stable, plenty of dogs and troops of friends. His was a genial, breezy nature; he had a firm hand, a just mind, and a clear brain, added to a boyish love of the unusual and adventurous. Peter was a favourite in the village. He liked pretty faces, and flirted openly, but he left the lasses' hearts none the worse. He fished and hunted with the lads; he talked politics with the tailor, religion with the cobbler, and with Jake, the rat-catcher, spent many a long afternoon. It was Jake who taught him to play upon the flute, and though he never managed to charm the rats with his music—as the strange little man did—he had the young men and maids capering on the bit of green before the inn door on summer evenings, long after they ought to have been abed.

His meditation was interrupted by a horseman calling from over the wall:

“Halloa! Peter, back again?”

It was Joel Hart.



"I'm glad to see you," said he.

"I thought you'd made up your mind to go abroad and seek your fortune," replied Peter, shaking hands heartily.

"So I had, but I broke it again. I couldn't be quite sure where to find the fortune."

They both laughed, but Joel had a note of envy in his mirth.

"You're a lucky dog, Peter," he exclaimed, "to have money in your pockets and a fond father ready to supply more. How long are you home for?"

"Six weeks. It's the Easter vacation."

"Good! we'll have some fishing and wrestling—eh? We'll make a damned fine holiday of it. I want something to take my mind off the worry of wondering where my bread and butter is to come from. You don't want to work, I bet; had enough of that sort of thing down yonder—eh? Come and have a glass at the Wild Boar."

He alighted and leading his horse by the bridle walked down the village street with Peter.

When they were boys they had gone nutting and fishing together, and the memory of many a hair-breadth escape still bound them with the links of affection, though in mind and character they had long since drifted apart.

Joel Hart was a handsome man. Beside him, Peter with his homely face, honest grey eyes, and loosely built figure looked rough-hewn—looked, indeed, that which he was, the off-spring of clean-living, hard-working peasant forefathers. The two men were of a height, but the one carried himself proudly, looking neither to right nor left; the other with an easy swing, that could stoop to give pennies



to a crying child, or lift a bundle for an old woman. There was an expression of arrogance and dissatisfaction on Joel's features that marred their beauty. He had dark curling hair, which he wore rather long, his eyes were large, well-shaped, full of a smouldering fire or melting sadness as his mood chanced to be.

The world had dealt hardly with him, and he could not forgive it. His father, the son of that ill-fated Joel Hart whom Annas Lynn had hidden in the wool-barn, had married late in life, and died shortly after, leaving his infant to be brought up by the widow—a vain and foolish woman. She had been indifferent to his discipline and education, and when she died, left the estate—it was a very small one—burdened with debts, a burden that increased rapidly, owing to extravagance and bad management. Joel was not competent to deal with it. A habit of indolence, fostered by his up-bringing, had become second nature to him; his temper was uncertain; yet he cared deeply for two things—Forest Hall and Lucy Lynn. To preserve the one, and gain the other was a wild dream that he dreamed, but made only fitful attempts to realise. He felt that he was bound by invisible bonds which he could not break.

“I'm getting to the end of my resources, Peter,” he said as they stood in the inn parlour, drinking. He often made a joke of his poverty; it was too well-known to be hidden; and he did not care that folk should see how much he felt it. “I've only one hope left.”

“I trust it's a substantial one,” remarked Peter.

Joel flung back his head and laughed.

“Ha, ha,” he cried, “ha, ha. It's the old great-grandmother up at Greystones.”



“ You’re not thinking of marrying her—are you ? ” said Peter, his eyes twinkling.

“ ’Pon my soul I never thought of it ! What a pity. She’d have had me, Peter, for the love she bore my grand-dad. I needn’t have waited till she was dead, then, to have got her money.”

“ She’s rich—is she ? ”

“ Must be ! an old miser ! She told me she was going to leave the little she had—little, mind you, and Greystones is the most prosperous farm for miles round—she said she was going to leave it to be divided between Barbara, Lucy, and me. She’s ninety-five now, and can’t live much longer, though she looks as hale and hearty an old sinner as ever laid up treasure in this world. I hope she’ll not forget her promise.”

“ Court her,” replied Peter, briefly.

“ Her or her great-granddaughters ? ” Joel shot a sharp glance at his companion. He sometimes thought that Peter had a warm side for Lucy as well as himself. “ All the same,” he continued, tossing off another glass, “ I’m breeding dogs, as a stand-by, in case she dies without leaving me a shilling. You must come and see them. I’ve got a litter of the prettiest pups you ever saw. I keep ’em in the parlour because the kennels are all out of repair. It’s a come-down, eh, for the master to sup his porridge in the kitchen, but feed his dogs under the very noses of his forefathers in their gilt frames ? ”

They talked a little longer, made plans to join the fox-hunt next morning, then Joel mounted his horse and rode away, while Peter retraced his steps up the village street.

He thought that Joel was changing. The man looked unhappy and restless in spite of his gay



demeanour. He talked too much, and he drank too much. He might be as poor as he asserted, but he rode a fine horse—Peter was a judge of horse-flesh—and his clothes were dandified beyond the fashion of the times. Yet there was something in him that appealed to Peter, who thought he looked like a gay bird in a trap. And what trap could be worse than one made out of family pride, poverty, and lack of education ?

Pondering upon his friend's character and circumstances, he passed through the village.

High Fold, in the midst of which the mill stood, was a cluster of houses on the fringe of Cringel Forest. They were built of grey stone, roofed with rough-hewn slates, where the yellow stonecrop ran riot, hung with queer little balconies, giving them a foreign air. They stood at all angles on either side of a steep road, at the foot of which was the inn, at the top the church. Except for the house known as Forest Hall, the farm of Greystones and a few solitary cots, High Fold marked the limit of human habitation in that direction. Beyond it were many miles of heathy moorland, a wild expanse of mountain, barren ravines, each with its own gushing beck, and wild marshes. The people were a healthy, thrifty race, lacking little—and those things not necessities—working hard and simply, and living to a good old age. Many of them herded sheep on the common lands ; a few wrought in a silver mine some distance off ; others spun and carded wool ; a tailor, a weaver, a rat-catcher and a blacksmith were respected members of the community. They owned a large flock of geese, each bird was smit with its owner's private mark, and a goose-girl, in the common employ, led them daily to their feeding-grounds. There were



few idle hands in the village, even the old men knitted stockings, sitting on the inn bench of a spring or summer evening.

Peter followed the road beyond the village, where it turned into a cart-track, and wound through Cringel Forest, leading to Forest Hall, and then on up the dale to Greystones.

As he lay under a beech-tree, watching the birds fluttering among the smooth branches, a little old man came wandering through and sat beside him.

The hair of the little old man curled on his shoulders, like a child's—though it was grey instead of golden—and his eyes were also like a child's, bright and questioning. He was primly dressed in a flowered waistcoat buff breeches and blue stockings, but the garments were faded and threadbare. On his knee he held a basket of roots and leaves.

“Meditation,” he said, “is the mother of great thoughts, and repose fosters them till they be well-grown.”

“That's comforting to my lazy soul,” drawled Peter.

The thin old voice continued, carefully choosing the words as though, even in meditation, nothing slipshod or ill-fitting was allowed to pass.

“We should find time to be idle,” he said. “When the soul is possessed by tranquillity, there enters in an angel called thought—a mysterious being, whose birth and origin is far beyond our knowledge or understanding. But we can give her housing, care for her like kind folk, and she will reward us abundantly. Her presence with us is her reward.”

Peter chewed a blade of grass, basking in the warm light. For a little while neither spoke. The last week



had shaken off all the appearance of winter from the forest. The trees were budding, a tall poplar rose purple as a plum, yonder a group of larches were turning green, and a sycamore had all its tips dipped in crimson. The blackthorn thicket was white, and the lesser celandines were golden on the banks. In the forest lay a deep blue silence—the silence of old wise trees, but on the topmost branches, gay and giddy birds were pouring out their hearts to the spring sunshine in a wild burst of melody.

“It’s all very beautiful,” said Peter; “that light on the beech-stems—it might be a splash of pure gold. The trees seem to be aware of it too—if only their leaves were out they would be clapping their hands for joy.” Then he turned to Timothy Hadwin. “I’m becoming a convert to your Faith,” he said. “I believe the earth has a soul and every living thing.”

“You feel it, then?” replied the old man, eagerly. “You feel a magic in the woods which only comes from the communion of souls? You and I and the trees are not alone here. You feel that other minds are reaching out to touch you, as you are reaching out to touch them? You have in your own mind this vision of the truth—the kinship of the living world?”

“Perhaps it’s imagination after all,” said Peter.

“Imagination does not lie.”

“It may deceive.”

“No, no. What we imagine is true for ourselves, though no one else may see it to be so. We each of us have senses, feelings, thoughts of our own. Were you to tell me that you saw a hamadryad coming out of yon beech-tree, I should not contradict you because I could not see it. But if you plucked a buttercup,



and said it was only coloured matter, I should say you were wrong, for I know it to be something more. The greatest blessing of life is sight, and the commonest ill is blindness." He laid his hand upon the ground and continued. "We are all akin, because we are all the children of the Earth. Her great mind is made up of our little minds. She knows us better than we know ourselves—do we know ourselves at all? I love to think of the Earth, a personality, a great angel rejoicing as a strong man to run a race, rushing along through the dark night or the bright day, through clouds and through sunshine, never halting or stumbling or going astray, carrying upon her bosom a multitudinous life, caring for it, as a thoughtful mother."

After this conversation the two men were silent for a while, each following the trend of his own thoughts. Then Timothy got up and went away. But Peter remained under the beech-tree.

Peter had capacity for the full enjoyment of life, and a boundless curiosity concerning it. As he lay on the ground he seemed to feel the heart of the Earth-mother beating under his own, and he was filled with a sense of her teeming vitality and his individual share of it. He opened his mind to the sounds and sights around. It delighted him to follow with his eyes the stems of the trees as they sprang straight from the bosom of their universal mother into the blue air. He listened to the whistling of the birds, the hum of the bees, and watched a rabbit leap among the ferns—pleased with such simple demonstrations of life. Perhaps a change was working in his own nature, for never had the common things about him seemed to be so full of absorbing interest as now; never had



he been so conscious of the sap running up the branches of the trees, and of his own vitality. At present he did but enjoy the sense of power, which he could use if he desired. But soon, he told himself, he would labour, singing in the light of the sun.

Then through the forest came Barbara Lynn, driving her primitive cart home from market. She did not see the figure under the beech-tree, for her eyes were dreaming, neither did Peter try to draw her attention. She sat with her hands lying loosely on her lap, the reins hanging slack as the old pony took its own pace home. Her fine, large features were composed, and she kept her jolting seat with unconcern. There was something patriarchal in the cart, and its rough-cut wooden wheels, and the regal form of Barbara, deep-bosomed, yellow-haired and clear-eyed as the offspring of shepherd kings should be.

She passed on, while the over-arching trees dropped lights and shadows across her face. Peter watched her till the blue distance of the forest closed round the cart, and the creaking of its wheels died into silence.

He came back to a knowledge of himself with a rush. For the time being his mind had been merged in the mind of another. The forest, too, was waking as from a trance. Barbara had seemed to hold it in the spell of her own dreaming. Now the wind blew down the track, trundling dead leaves before it, and drawing a low chiming from the branches overhead. The birds burst into renewed twittering, and the rabbits leaped among the fern.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES

BARBARA was driving sheep on the fells above Cringel Forest. She looked down and saw the trees bourgeoning into leaf, and rising out of them, on the top of a jutting crag, the old house belonging to Joel Hart. It was an unpretentious place, but battlemented and loop-holed, made for defence when moss-troopers paid frequent visits, and not for beauty or comfort. It was, in fact, little better than a fortified farm-house ; underneath it ran a long dark cellar, where the cattle of the villagers could be driven for safety in times of alarm.

Barbara's keen eyes—keen as an eagle's to scan the broad fell-side—noted the air of decay which had settled upon it, the thicket of brambles among the chimneys, and how a pine, growing out of the rocks, encroached upon the doorway. Behind the house the ground swept steeply up, strewn with shattered boulders and weeping with waterfalls.

“ Poor Joel,” she said to herself. “ He's like Paris, in the book Peter gave me—beautiful Paris that Helen loved, whose soul ill-matched his fair form.”

She thought of her sister's adoration of this man, and was sad. There could be nothing but disappointment in store for Lucy, she felt sure of it, unless the

girl overcame her affection and set her heart upon a more worthy object. But she was attracted by the glamour of fallen greatness, by his handsome presence, and she admired his pride. Barbara, with clearer vision, saw a man tossed about by circumstance, without a guiding principle in his life, whose pride was as hollow a thing as a soul ever cherished.

She turned away from Forest Hall, and the quieting thoughts which Joel roused, and looked up the dale. It wound in sun-swept greenness to Thundergay, where Swirtle Tarn glittered like a silver sixpence. For some days clouds had been gathering there, piled one on the other like wool-sacks, white and soft as wool just now, but stained crimson at sunrise, and black as smoke at night. The light was vivid, and had that peculiar quality of deepening the colours of the landscape, often the forerunner of storm; the purple of the distant hills was more intense, the green of the grass richer, the red of ploughed earth more passionate.

The sheep that Barbara was driving were uneasy, making many attempts to break and turn back. Then the leader, recognising the summer heaf to which the flocks return in spring, after having wintered in a more sheltered place, set off at a run, followed by the rest. Shading her eyes from the sun, she watched them leap gladly upwards, bleating their welcome to the well-remembered spot—for the bond binding the sheep to their hill-pasture, is as the bond between man and his own hearthstone.

She turned homewards. As she threaded her way among the rocks of the rough path, she came upon Jan Straw gathering wool, which the sheep had left behind them upon the heath and brambles.

“Her was buried in a linen shift,” he said, answering



her remark that he was busy at a strange gleaning. "Her was buried in a linen shift, fine and white and soft as snow."

"Who?" asked the girl, for she saw that his mind was wandering.

"Her o' the white fingers, white as Lucy Lynn's, white like the linen she was buried in, white as snow."

"Your wife, Jan?" said Barbara, having in her mind's eye a vision of golden curls and a little pale face, which had been buried long before she was born.

Jan said no more, but, turning away, continued his gleaning.

"What are the wisps for?" she asked.

"I mun be buried in woollen," he muttered, "the law says so—it said so then—but she had a linen shroud, the best linen as ever was wove, shining like snow, like them little white flowers she loved."

He stood up, trying to straighten his crooked back, crooked with the toil and poverty of years.

"I mun be buried in woollen," he repeated, "and I's picking my shroud off the brambles. Yon little lass, Lucy, her o' the white hands, she promised to spin it for me and get it wove. It wunna be white like snow, like her own bonny hands, but it'll match my old grey face. I's'll not be buried by the parish. I's'll lie aside her in the kirk-garth below there."

He wiped a tear from his eye.

"Her should have been buried in woollen too," he added, bringing these memories from the abyss of his mind, where they had long lain in darkness, "but her was so white and soft, white as milk and soft as silk, her couldna abide the touch o' a woollen shift. So her was buried in linen, and I paid the fine."

"It will take a lot of gathering, Jan, before you



get enough to make a shroud," said Barbara. "But let it be, let it be ; leave it for the birds to build their nests of. You shall have a fleece, and a decent bed, too, when you need it, beside her o' the little white hands."

He looked at the girl slowly, from her feet to the crown of her head.

"Thee's a girt lass," he said, "as big as the mistress, and they used to call her daughter o' the giant that lived at Ketel's Parlour. But thee's got a kind, soft voice, Barbara Lynn, like the cooin' o' wood-doves. Wilta gie me a fleece ?"

She nodded, and the pale watery eyes brightened.

"The birds is welcome to my gatherin'," he replied scattering his bundle of wool. "I's'll go and pull rushes. We's gettin' short o' candles down-by," and he shuffled away.

Barbara watched him go. She thought how hard it was to be old and lonely and poor. Jan had bed and whittle-gate at the farm—decency could do no other after a life of honest service—but, as the old man was past work, what use had he for wages ? Such was her great-grandmother's argument for refusing to part with a penny of her hoard.

Barbara went slowly down-hill. She had an hour to spare before milking-time, and it was too precious to be lost. She passed along a ledge of the Mickle Crag, found a sheltered spot, and sat down. She could not see Greystones, as it lay right below her, but she could smell the turf-smoke from its fire.

There, with her hands clasped upon her knees, surrounded by a wilderness of grey rocks, she gave wings to her mind. All through this Easter-tide she had walked as in a dream ; but it was the dream and



not the actual that had life. She came and went, rose before dawn, and passed the day toiling upon the fells, but now and again she culled an hour to spend with her book—Pope's "Homer"—at the cave. Sometimes Peter came there and read to her, often the old herbalist Timothy Hadwin accompanied him, and the two men would talk, while she listened, weaving withy baskets, but weaving into her own mind many a wonderful thought. Thus she learned to know the old stories of Achilles and Hector and Helen, of Ulysses and Penelope; she was thrilled with the beauty, pathos and madness of them. The natural objects about her began to take on a new meaning; she was able to feel the freshness of the early world, when men's hearts were fuller of the mystery of things, less sure of their own place in the Universe, and stricken with fear before the veiled faces of the gods.

She likened her mind to the shield of Achilles, which Vulcan forged for him; she thought of it as a great disc engraved with strange pictures—emblems of all that she thought and knew and felt. But as the ocean encompassed the shield—

“ In living silver seemed the waves to roll,  
And beat the buckler's verge, and bound the whole,”

so about her beat the waves of a mystery, which shut in a part of her life, that her inward eye might concentrate upon it, and yet be conscious of the depths surging round.

The human mind is stupendous, she thought, beyond the power of man to understand. When she considered her own mind, and all that was written upon it—its ideas of life, of men and women, of religion



and destiny, she was awed with wonder that a thing so mighty should have been forged for her by the hand which gave her life.

Her own existence was too uneventful, too full of commonplaces, too mean, to provide a satisfying food for her strong intellect. But in "Homer" she found a feast spread. His men and women lived down to the depths of their being, and she lived in them. Hecuba and Andromache! the greatness and bitterness of their lives appalled and stirred her. When she stood upon the heights and saw the mists rise like smoke from the dale, or roll from ledge to ledge down the fell-side, when she saw the beck in spate, when she looked through the gloaming at the ruined outlines of the crags, then she participated in the very thoughts of these great women; then she felt the presence of gods in the mist; then she saw Achilles flee before the angry River; then she saw Troy and the long black ships, and the lines of glittering warriors, and in her own heart she heard the cry of defeated hosts, of exultation, of death, of resignation.

Barbara roused herself from these thoughts. She was lingering too long in idleness. She must go and call the cattle, for milking-time was near. So she came swiftly down the crags behind the house. They were rough and steep, rotten in many places, and drilled with springs. But a little sheep-path led in and out, bordered with bleaberries and parsley ferns. In one cleft a thorn had taken root, and baffled the wind and storms of years; in another grew a holly; but for the most part the place was bare of vegetation. Soon she saw the chimneys of Greystones below her.



Lucy stood in the dairy churning. The door was open, and she could see into the cow-house, and through it, framed as in a picture, the fell-side aglow with the afternoon sunshine. She was tired, her hair was ruffled, and her cheeks were flecked with cream. Her eyes, at times, were almost blinded with tears, and she saw the distant glories through mist. The good green earth called to her, but she was doomed to toil at the churn in the semi-gloom of the dairy while the day fled, while life fled.

She longed to be out in the sunshine ; she wanted to plait rush-baskets as she had done as a child, to fish for minnows in the beck, to wander down the dale and smell the aromatic scent of the springing bracken. She looked at Jan Straw, who sat on the doorstep peeling rushes. He was like a worn-out garment ; she, too, would be like a worn-out garment before long. Life was hurrying, hurrying by ; not long ago she had been a child, to-day she was a woman, soon she would be old with life behind her. Lucy dreaded growing old. Each morning when she woke she thought that the day must surely bring some change, but it passed as the day before had done, passed in monotonous labour, leaving her a little older, a little sadder, a little less hopeful. Now and then she cherished the thought that she was a woman grown, and whispered to herself of love and home and husband. But to-day she wanted to cast off all responsibility, to have the mind and outlook of a child.

She paused for a moment to wipe the splashes of cream from her cheeks, and rest her arms. Then her great-grandmother called :

“ Lucy ! ”

It was no use pretending that she had not heard ; the tones of the old voice demanded a reply.

“ Yes,” she answered, reluctantly.

“ Has the butter come yet, Lucy ? ”

“ Nay.”

“ Nay ? I doubt the butter will never come to idle hands.”

The girl began again, and the thud, thud of the churn was like the angry beating of her heart.

Lucy's unwonted despondency rose from the strange temper of Joel. Usually he was as affectionate as she could desire, but sometimes, without any reason that she knew, he would be taciturn and neglectful. Yet he loved her—she did not doubt it. There was an inconsistency in him, and it puzzled her. For to Lucy's understanding, character should be simple, and not a thing of complex feelings and contradictory impulses. Though Joel purposed the highest achievements, he rarely attained ; though he said that he adored her, he could not rouse his energy to fulfil his responsibilities. She was unhappy, trying to piece together these parts of him, and present a clear picture to her mind.

At last she heard the plop-plop of butter in the churn, and her eyes brightened. When the brain is distracted with questions it is unable to solve, that concern the inner life, it finds relief in turning to outward shows, where something is being accomplished—be it only the coming of butter.

The hind had cleaned out the byre, and shaken down fresh straw. It glistened in the gloom like thick golden threads, soon to be trodden under the hoofs of the cows. Lucy could hear her sister's voice as she drove them from their pasture across the bridge to



the milking. They lumbered in single file up the path—red cows, white cows, piebald cows, with straight horns and full swinging udders, their brown eyes looking from under their lashes with an expression of innocent content.

Lucy was in a mood to draw analogies from everything about her, and she thought of the yellow straw and Barbara's hair, and how soon life, with its heavy foot, would beat out its gold.

"If you could have a wish just now, that would come true," she said, "what would you wish for most in the world?"

Barbara leaned her cheek against the warm side of Cushy, her favourite cow, and pondered this question, while the only sound was the swish of milk into the pail.

"Eyes," she remarked at length.

"Eyes? You're not going blind, Barbara?"

"Nay, nay, I've got the best eyes in the dale. I can count twelve stars in the Pleiades, and no one else can see more than six. It's not them kind of eyes I want—it's spirit-eyes."

"Oh, Barbara, do you want to see spooks?"

The girl laughed, and then was silent. At last she said:

"I feel that if we could push a curtain aside, we'd find ourselves in a wonderful world. It's here, about us, on every hand, but we can't get in."

"Spooks!" again exclaimed Lucy. "I've seen a spook. It's the spirit of this old house—a grinning, grey hag, grey as its name—and it's got you and me in its grip; but I'll get away from it, see if I don't. It takes the very life out of me—haunts me like a shadow."

“Shut your eyes to it,” said Barbara; “don’t think of it, then it won’t bother you.”

“Shut my eyes! So I do; but it’s my bed-fellow when you’re not here. It gets close to me—ugh!—and whispers and whispers——”

“Well, what does it whisper?”

“Horrid things—all about death and sorrow and pain——”

“They’re the common lot of us creatures. You won’t escape them even if you run away from Greystones.”

“I’m off now, at any rate,” and Lucy took her milk cans and set out for High Fold. It was her habit to meet Joel at this time, on her way through Cringel Forest, and glean from their short meeting either joy or unhappiness upon which to feed herself until the same hour of the next evening.

The road to the village lay along the beck-side, and crossed the stream by an old stone bridge just beyond the falls. The bridge was garlanded in summer with honeysuckle; already the pale green leaves were out—the first green leaves in the dale—and the sight gladdened the heart of the girl. The further away she got from Greystones the happier she grew; she threw off the brooding despondency that had clouded her spirit all day, and hummed as she walked. The evening air was balmy, the snow had vanished from the fells, spring had come at last.

She had not gone far when she met Peter Fleming on his way to see her great-grandmother. He was swinging along at a good pace, with books tucked under each arm, and whistling like a blackbird. But he turned and walked with her to the edge of the forest. She could not help a momentary wish that Peter, with his honest grey eyes, and open smile were



Joel. She could have rested her heart in peace upon him. She would never have been troubled with doubts. She would have been like a bird, buoyed up like a bird on the calm blue waters of the mere, as happy and unconcerned a creature as any on the earth. He had never shown her anything but a brotherly affection, but she knew by instinct that artful fingers, and a pretty face could cause his heartstrings to vibrate. Yet it was Joel, and not Peter, whom she loved.

He left her at the edge of the forest, and she followed one of the many paths by which it was intersected, that led to a clearing where Timothy Hadwin's cottage stood. But his door was shut, so she left his can of milk on the doorstep, and ran down to a little dell to meet Joel. She jingled her cans so that he might hear her coming.

He was waiting for her with his back against a tree-trunk.

A sweeter trysting-place these lovers could not have chosen. The mossy banks were starred with celandines, now closing with the lengthening shadows; hollies, dense and glossy-leaved, formed a complete screen around, and down in the bottom, among grey pebbles, a spring bubbled up, as clear as crystal and cold as ice, widening into a pool, in which the lovely slim bodies of the sunbeams by day, and the moonbeams by night, bathed and swam.

Joel was in a lively humour, but Lucy would be serious.

"Oh, lad, lad," she whispered, "take me away from Greystones. I'm so unhappy there."

"Unhappy! What or who has been frightening you, Lucy? Is it the old woman?"

She shuddered.

"I'm sure the place is haunted."

"So it is—by your great-grandmother. It's not canny to have a great-grandmother, Lucy. She ought to be a ghost by now."

"Oh, I'd rather have her as she is," replied the girl. "She can't get out of the four-poster—at any rate she won't till she's dead. Then"—she shivered again, and moved closer to him—"she would soon be after us, keeking through the bushes, and crying out in that sharp voice of hers: 'Lucy, Lucy, away to your bed!' But, Joel, I wish you would tell her that you want to marry me."

"God forbid," he said fervently.

"Why not, Joel? Don't you want to marry me? She's fonder of you than she is of me."

He plucked a bunch of the little yellow flowers and twined them in her curls.

"You're very pretty to-night, Lucy," he answered, "and you know I want to marry you more than anything else in the world. But it would not help us for me to tell her so, though she does profess to like the looks of me. She likes the looks of her money better."

"What's that to do with it?"

"She'd want to know if I expected her to keep us."

"You could say 'No.'"

"Then she'd want to know if I could keep you."

"You could say 'Yes.'"

"But I can't keep you, Lucy. I can't keep myself, not yet, though I have hopes that my luck is changing," he spoke mysteriously.

"Shall we never be married?" she asked wearily, leaning her head upon his shoulder.



“ We must wait a little longer.”

“ It’s always wait, wait, wait, Joel.”

“ Well, you see, you shouldn’t have fallen in love with such a poverty-stricken creature. But I thank God—whenever I thank Him at all—that you did. You’re the only soul that has ever cared for me, Lucy. My mother blew the thought of me away as though I had been dust; and old Mally Ray, honest heart, doesn’t know the meaning of real love. I don’t think her religion approves of the word. Look up, Lucy, and let me see you smile—it’s a garden of roses to me, that smile of yours.”

She did look up, but to ask in a cold voice :

“ How much money have you, Joel ? ”

“ Only a penny piece, but, like the widow’s cruse, it’s going to multiply.”

“ Really ? ”

“ You shall see. Some fine morning I’ll come riding up to Greystones and carry you off to be lady of Forest Hall.”

She gazed at him through the dusk, at his handsome face and lithe figure. He was a glorious make of a man. How could she ever have distrusted him ? His eyes were looking into hers with an expression of the tenderest regard, his arms were round her, his voice was whispering endearing words.

So she gave herself up to the joy of loving and being loved, having cast all her doubts and suspicions away as unworthy of her and disloyal to him.

They sat on a fallen tree with arms entwined. It was growing rapidly darker ; owls began to hoot in the forest ; a damp, sweet smell rose from the undergrowth. They talked bravely, as young things do, of the future.

Then Lucy ran home by the singing beck, up to the lonely house under the crags, happy in Joel's promise that he would soon come for her openly, and ask for her great-grandmother's blessing, which he was sure to get if he came with full pockets.

How they were to be filled she did not know or ask. But Joel had assured her that his luck was changing at last.



## CHAPTER V

### THE WAKING OF THE HOLY WELL

“THEE’LL be home betimes,” said Mistress Lynn.

Lucy was standing before the kitchen looking-glass, pinning a flower into the bosom of her cotton gown. She glanced up with a curl of rebellion on her lips, then tossed her head and replied :

“Aye.”

“Thee’ll mind that now, my lass,” continued the old woman ; “I’ll have no bairn o’ mine wandering about Cringel Forest after dark.”

“You did it yourself, great-granny,” said Lucy, with resentment. “Many’s the time I’ve heard you tell of waking the Holy Well till midnight.”

“M’appen I did, Lucy,” and she smiled grimly ; “but I don’t choose that you should follow me. You might gang astray.”

“Well, I’ll be back before dark,” answered the girl.

“At nine o’clock ? ”

“Aye, at nine o’clock ! It’s a wonder you don’t say seven or six maybe.”

“So I would if I saw a reason for it ; but I don’t,” replied Mistress Lynn imperturbably. “Go thy wayes now, and come back with a more respectful tongue in thy head. I’ll be glad to be rid of thy saucement for a while.”

Lucy went out into the sunshine gaily. This was one of her few holidays in the year, and for very shame her great-grandmother could not keep her drudging at the farm when the whole village was bent on pleasure, waking the Holy Well. The day was Tuesday in Easter Week. The sky was blue ; the birds were in the full rush of nest-making ; the leaves were coming out like magic ; everything was light-hearted.

To be sure the new curate had cast a cold eye on the festivities, and even spoken against them from the church at the top of the village street ; but his sour looks and words could not take the sweetness out of the day, or stifle the merriment of his parishoners. They had waked the well on the 23rd of April for generations—long before there was a church in High Fold, long before good St. Kentergerne had preached the Gospel to their forefathers. They had waked it in the days when mistletoe grew in Cringel Forest, and when they worshipped strange gods at the Stannin' Stanes on the fell-side yonder. Christianity had merely given the old pagan custom, which it could not stamp out, a Christian significance. No young, up-start curate, with his austere views, could prevent the people from clinging with affection to a festivity, sanctioned by the ages, and providing so bright a break in the routine of their sombre lives.

When Lucy reached the churchyard crowds were already gathered. The well—a stream of water bubbling into a stone trough by the lychgate—was hung with garlands of ferns and flowers ; the village street was choked with traffic and booths, where nuts and gingerbread, and gaily-coloured confections were being sold by dames in their Sunday best. Timothy Hadwin dispensed powders, balms and essences to



the shepherds and their wives—many of whom had come miles over the mountains, and had not been to High Fold since this time last year.

“Sixpence worth o’ the linctus, Timothy. It’s main good for the cough : my man would have died last winter if I hadn’t given him it regular ; the snow and the wind was sommat awfu’ back the fells.”

“A pound o’ camomile, Tim, old man. There’s nowt like camomile-tea when your innards are no’ peacefu’ like ! ”

“Have you any o’ that elder-flower water, Master Timothy, what makes your cheeks soft ? ” whispered a lass, with a hasty look round to see that no young man could overhear her.

But the chief interest of Timothy’s stall was a microscope, mounted on a brass stand, through which the folk could examine a variety of interesting objects ; a kaleidoscope, and a burning glass.

On the green, in front of the inn, games were in full swing, and in a corner of the churchyard half-hidden by the ancient gravestones, a cock-fight drew the male population like needles to a magnet. A big brown bear was dancing to amuse the children ; there were jugglers and jesters from the nearest town ; fortune-tellers with swarthy skins and coral necklaces, and that dearest of delights to both old and young, a Punch-and-Judy show.

Lucy looked about her for a sight of Joel’s tall figure, but he was not to be seen. She wandered here and there, and though she was greeted by merry voices, and answered them merrily enough, she was disappointed. Where was he ? and why did he not meet her as he had promised ? He ought to have been on the look-out for her coming, not she for his



But Peter Fleming saw her and ran across the short, bright turf.

“Come and dance with me,” he said; “the old blind fiddler is striking up a jig.”

Lucy slipped her hand through his arm, but still looked round for Joel. She caught sight of his head rising above a gravestone as he watched the cock-fight. A slight flush mounted to her brow; her eyes sparkled still more brightly, and she tripped down the street to the place where the fiddler sat on a bench tuning his strings, never casting another glance behind.

“Thee’s the best dancer in High Fold, Peter,” she said gaily; “it’s like swinging in the air to dance with you. Come on, lad, my feet can’t bide still when they hear the music.”

She looked a bonny lass with her jetty curls and blue eyes. She floated through the dance like a feather; she laughed like a bell. Peter was in a mood to be attracted by her smiles. He had spent his holiday in delightful idleness; he had been petted at home and made much of by the villagers, and, though his head had not been turned, his heart was in a condition to be easily stirred. He enjoyed a flirtation in much the same way as he had enjoyed eating a stolen apple when he was a boy—the excitement of getting it attracted him, and gave a flavour to the thing attained.

Lucy was ready to aid and abet him. She received his attentions with a coy humour, ate gingerbread rabbits with him, danced with him, and gave him a flower from her hair to wear in his button-hole. But her thoughts were elsewhere, and her eyes again and again strayed in Joel’s direction. It was a salve to her wounded feelings to see that he had noticed her,



and was standing sulky and aloof on the outskirts of the crowd. She would punish him well, and then forgive him, as she always forgave him, and would always forgive him for worse offences.

"Where's Barbara?" asked Peter, as Lucy rested on the grass and he fanned her with a dock leaf. His eyes, too, had been straying, seeking for a golden head and stately throat above the throng.

"She's nursing a sick sheep," replied her sister. "Poor Barbara! there is never any fun for her!—not that she wants it as I do, but something always comes in the way to spoil her outings."

"Barbara's an angel," said Peter.

"She is that!" answered Lucy fervently.

He clasped his hands behind his head, and looked up into the face of the girl beside him. He never had any inclination to look at Barbara so; he never lay at her feet and talked nonsense. There was something of a man's attitude towards another man in his way of regarding her. She was strong and self-reliant and high-minded; he only dimly understood her. But that which he did understand drew his deepest reverence. He had two sides to his nature, as most folk have; and though Lucy appealed to the happy, homely, youthful part of him, with Barbara he was a serious-hearted man, who knew that life was no game, and who purposed to live strenuously in his appointed place.

The afternoon wore on towards evening. The sun was getting low, and the church flung a dark shadow on the graveyard. The folk drew together in groups, sat themselves down upon the benches, and streamed in and out of the Wild Boar. Before it, on a plot of grass, the bear was dancing.



It looked mangy and starved. Yet even in its present condition it kept some of the majesty of its early years, when it had been free to wander among the forests of a distant land. Gentle and timid it was among the human beings that stood around, laughing at its clumsy ways, and sometimes prodding it with sticks ; but it turned at bay when a snarling dog ventured too near.

The gipsy—a long, lean fellow, whose eyes smouldered—leaned against the horse-trough and piped. He looked, among the fair-haired country folk, as much of an alien as the bear dancing on an English green. His slack, nervy figure needed but a word to make it taut as steel. He had a barbed stick by his side, and a chain, from the animal's collar, fastened to a ring round his wrist. He was much bedizened with coloured ribbons and brass buttons.

Peter stood on the steps of the inn and watched the scene with keen pleasure. He liked the bear, although its eyes were dim with neglect, and its fur clotted and evil-smelling. It suggested to him the infinite variety and complexity of life. Its proper home was in distant forests ; it had feelings and instincts which he could not even imagine ; its destiny had no parallel with his ; yet by its patience, gentleness and power to suffer it was linked with his own nature. He liked the gipsy, for he felt a chord of fellowship between them. Here was one who disdained to sleep, eat and die among the crowd ; who lived a roving life in the green lanes, coming and going as he pleased, free as air. Such a life attracted Fleming, who cared more for liberty than a dry bed. He liked the village folk—nay, he loved them, though they stood open-mouthed, like children, and were pleased



as children at the ungainly ambling of the bear. He knew that they were stolid, narrow-minded; but round them his affections twined. They were the root from which he sprang.

It was Peter's habit to find some likeness between himself and the world about him. Many of his ideas he had imbibed from Timothy Hadwin, who when he was a child had taught him Latin and Greek, and used every opportunity to impress the boy with a sense of the mystery of the universe.

Life touched life through the three kingdoms. The tiniest flower in the hedgerow and the king on his throne were but links in one great chain. It was this sense of his relationship to the whole living creation that gave breadth to Peter's outlook, intensity to his mind, and power to his bearing. He tried to understand, and he deeply loved all nature. His college friends looked upon him as a crank, yet they respected him greatly; for they once saw him bridle and ride a bucking horse that no one else dared approach.

While the gipsy lazily piped upon his whistle, and the bear continued to dance, Peter entered the inn and persuaded the scolding housewife—whose head was fairly whirling with so much coming and going—to ransack her store for some of last year's honey. She gave it to him reluctantly; but, then, he would never be denied anything when he asked for it. He fed the beast with the melliferous morsel and such was the creature's appreciation that he insisted upon following Peter, wagging his head from side to side with a most ludicrous motion, as though coaxing him for more.

"You're a cupboard lover, my friend, I fear," said Peter.

The bear sat down, whoofed and whimpered, while his master twitched at the chain.

“Hungry, eh?” Peter poked him in the ribs. “You look like it; never saw a bigger bag of bones in my life! Here, you fellow, why don’t you feed him better?”

“What’s that to you?”

“I don’t like to see a hungry brother.”

“Get up,” said the man to the bear; but it would not move, and continued to whimper and look at Peter. The gipsy grasped his stick in one hand, while he shortened the chain with the other. His temper was rising.

“Leave the poor brute alone,” interposed Peter; “it’s only crying for its supper, like little Tommy Tucker. Nay, now, leave it alone.”

“Is it yours or mine, master?”

“Why, mine. See what a fancy it’s taken to me!” He laughed good-humouredly.

“I’ve a notion the beast would make a nice pet. What’ll you sell him for, you fellow?”

The gipsy took no notice; he thought that Fleming was fooling him. He raised his stick threateningly, but before the sharp point, which the bear had learnt to know and fear, could descend, it was twisted out of his hands.

“Might is right,” said Peter, with a broad grin.

The man was angry; his was a nature that could ill brook crossing. He clenched his fists, and came nearer, but he looked twice at his antagonist, and decided that discretion was the better part of valour. Peter was not only broader than himself, but taller, and he had heard that the gentleman was a great wrestler.



“Ho, my good fellow,” said Fleming, “are you going to fight me for him? Better come into the inn and settle the matter over a pot of beer.”

“What do you want the bear for, master?”

“To play with—poodles aren’t in my line. I need something big. Besides, I’ve an idea you’ll be sending him to the knacker’s in a week or two, and I’d like to save him from such a fate.”

The gipsy looked him over, wondering if he were in jest or earnest.

“Honest! quite honest!” said Peter, reading the man’s glance.

The gipsy’s eyes began to sparkle, and he turned towards the inn.

“Come on, master,” said he; “if you wants the bear you shall have him.”

They went in, while Jake the rat-catcher called after them:

“Don’t let the fellow cheat you, lad. He wouldn’t get sixpence for the carcass if he sold it for dog’s meat. There isn’t a crow-picking on its bones.”

Peter and the gipsy were not long within. They came out laughing, the latter wiping his mouth, his dark, lean countenance showing signs of satisfaction.

Fleming pulled his flute out of his pocket, played the tune that the bear’s master had been whistling, and the ungainly beast began to dance.

“Eh, lad, yon’s a nice new pet you’ve gotten. Your mother will be main pleased to have it sitting in the chimney-nook,” said one of the crowd.

“Take it to bed with thee,” remarked Dusty John, who had long ceased to wonder at the vagaries of his son, but was rather pleased with them than otherwise. “It will keep thee warm o’ nights.”

“Nay, nay, it’s ower moth-eaten to have much warmth in it. Best hap it up in camphor, Peter, and get some of Old Camomile’s powder to put away the fleas.”

Meanwhile Lucy had found Joel. The sun had set, and the rooks were flying home above Cringel Forest.

“Come with me up the dale,” she said softly.

He was not disposed to be friendly.

“Cheer up, lad,” she continued. “Let’s be kind again.”

With a face still lowering, and his whole frame the very embodiment of injured pride, he turned and walked beside her.

He was jealous of Peter, yet sensible that he was to blame, not she.

“You’d better marry Peter,” he said at last, breaking the silence.

“Who talks of marrying?” replied Lucy, coolly.

“He’s got money and brains. He’d make you a worthier husband than I.”

He kicked the stones out of his path and switched the heads off the primroses that were growing by the wayside. The truth was, which Lucy did not know, that he had been betting and had lost. When they came to the edge of the forest, and the open dale lay before them, all gloomy with shadows, Lucy turned.

“Good-night, Joel,” she said, and made as if to go. “I’m sorry you’re so cross. It’s spoilt my day, my only holiday; good-night.”

But he flung his arm round her, his anger vanishing like a cloud that has discharged its ill humours.

“Stay,” he said. “I know I’m a brute. But let us go back. There’ll be more dancing, and we’ll



trip the moon up into the sky and out of it again. I'm a better dancer than Peter. He's too heavy on his toes—you found that, eh?—rather a clumsy fellow, too loose in the make to be a comfortable partner. Come back. Come and see the rockets and torches. We'll have a good time, lots of fun. Who knows whether we'll see the wakes together again?"

She relented at once, dissolved like snow in the sun, when she heard the pleading tones of his voice.

"But I promised great-granny."

"Stay," he repeated, and began to draw her back to the forest.

"I daren't, Joel; she'd never forgive me."

"Only a little longer."

"Nay."

Yet why should she not stay? Her great-grandmother had enjoyed such occasions to the full when she was young. Why should Lucy not do the same? She might go home, bid the old woman good-night, and when the doors were barred, and the candles out, and Mistress Lynn thought she was safely in her bed, slip downstairs, and escape by the cow-house. She asked Joel what he thought of her plan.

"I'll wait for you," he said, "don't be long. But there's Barbara! She'd never consent. Stay now do, Lucy; don't go in. Let's go back to the village, and you can face the din to-morrow morning. Lay all the blame on me."

She shuddered.

"You don't know what great-grandmother's like when she's roused! But Barbara's at Ketel's Parlour. It's not likely she'll come home to-night, unless the sheep is dead. The sheep don't often die in her



hands, for she looks after them as though they were sick bairns. I'll not be long, Joel."

She slipped from his arms like a child bent on mischief, laughing under her breath, yet not altogether at ease—it was no light undertaking for anyone to try and hoodwink old Mistress Lynn.

The great-grandmother looked at the clock as soon as she entered, and seemed grimly surprised at Lucy's punctuality. A cotter's wife rose from the settle and hurried away, so as to get her share of the festivities. She had been keeping the old woman company during the girl's absence.

"Sit thee down now," said Mistress Lynn, "and tell me about the wake."

"I's so tired, great-granny," yawned Lucy.

"Tired! At your age I could dance till dawn and not be too tired to milk the kye at sunrise."

Lucy sat down with an aggrieved expression.

"If you'd let me dance till dawn I'd maybe have had the better grace to tell you about it," she replied with some spirit.

"Well, get away to bed. Thee's got a sharp tongue that it's no gert pleasure for an old woman to hear."

Lucy went upstairs, and moved about for a while, then she sat on the edge of the bed and waited. It was a tedious waiting, but she dared not creep downstairs, and let herself out by the cow-house door till there was some likelihood of her great-grandmother being asleep.

At last she thought that she might venture. She took off her shoes, and slipped noiselessly down; the stairs were made of stone, so they could not betray her by creaking. On the wall opposite the kitchen was a little round beam of light. It shone through



a hole in the door, where a knot had come out. Lucy was surprised ; she wondered what Mistress Lynn could be doing with a light at this hour. She put her eye to the hole and looked through. She could see the bed, and the old woman's hands, but not her face.

The candle flung a misty light on a pile of glittering coins in one withered hand. Her great-grandmother was counting them, dropping them one by one into a bag.

Lucy was riveted to the spot. She could not tear herself away, even though Joel was waiting, hidden in the copse just below the house. She could hear a faint click as the coins fell against one another. That bag was filled. The thin old hands picked up another, and poured its contents upon the quilt. Lucy watched like one fascinated. She saw her great-grandmother pick up several bags, and count many handfuls of money—some of it silver, some of it gold. She waited until the candle was put out, and she heard the curtains softly drawn. Mistress Lynn had composed herself to sleep.

Lucy opened the cow-house door and stole out into the night. A clear moon was shining ; the foam of the beck looked like white horses tossing in the wind, and the primroses glimmered like stars. Joel was still waiting.

“ You can't say that I haven't patience,” he said.

Lucy began to speak excitedly.

“ I've seen such a sight, lad, such a sight ! I've seen great-granny counting her money.”

“ I knew she'd got a store somewhere,” he replied. “ I wish I had ! It would come in very handy just now,”

“ But, Joel, she’s old, and when she dies——”

“ We’ll all be rich folk, Lucy.”

“ And we can be married then, lad, and put Forest Hall in trim, and be happy.”

He laughed, but not very spontaneously.

“ There goes a rocket over the trees,” he said.

“ It goes up like my hope,” replied Lucy.

But the thing burst and was gone.

“ Prophetic, I fear,” said Joel.

When they came under the black shadow of the crag on the top of which Forest Hall was built, they paused and glanced up.

The moonlight brought the battlements into relief against the sky, and shone silvery upon the fir-tree, growing out of a niche, and sweeping the front wall with its feathery boughs. The house was very high, strange and frowning, grander than it ever looked by daylight.

Joel gripped Lucy’s hand with a sudden excess of feeling.

“ I’ll never part with Forest Hall,” he said, as though he saw in his mind’s eye someone who wanted to take it from him. “ I’ll never sell the old place. If I go down into ruins, it shall go down into ruins with me. We’ll fall together.”

“ Don’t talk so fiercely, Joel,” replied Lucy, gently smoothing his fingers to take the strain out of their grip. “ Forest Hall will some day be refurnished from cellar to garret, and you and I will live there like a pair of cooing doves. Haven’t you told me so many a time ? ”

“ Of course, Lucy,” he said, relaxing.

They walked on again, and near the outskirts of the forest met Peter and his bear.



“Hulloa, what have you there?” said Joel, while the girl drew back, not caring to be caught alone with him at this time of the night.

“A lap-dog for you, Joel.”

“The deuce have you! And what do you expect me to do with it?”

“Give it housing room. You’ve got an empty shed, haven’t you?”

“Two or three. You’re a rum chap!” and Joel laughed, for he could never keep his resentment in his friend’s breezy presence.

“There’s a good fellow. May I put Big Ben—such is his name, I’m told—into one of them?”

“Great heavens! do you want me to take the bear?”

“It’s as gentle as a lamb! Would you like to see me put my head in its mouth?”

“No! lead it away, fix it where you like; but I say, Peter, you don’t expect me to look after it, do you?”

“Give it lodging only! Jake’s going to see to its board. Many thanks, Joel. I’m off to-morrow, but I’ll be up to bid you good-bye in the morning. Come along, you limping Ursus, it’s time you were abed.”

## CHAPTER VI

### JOEL'S DARKNESS

EASTER was over ; Peter Fleming had gone back to Oxford ; Joel Hart spent much of his time away from home ; the lambing season was past ; midsummer had come.

Joel had friends after his own heart scattered through the countryside—young men with small estates and little education like himself. They for-gathered in each other's houses, and spent their time cock-fighting and gambling, losing one day to gain the next, enjoying and suffering all the excitements of prosperity and failure in quick succession.

Joel began by winning, and saw an easy way of retrieving his fortunes opening out before him. Then he lost, and, growing desperate, lost more and more heavily, till he had little left to lose. He owed money to the village tradesmen, but that did not trouble his conscience. When he could not meet his debts of honour—as he was pleased to call them—he felt disgraced ; hurt in his pride. So he came riding home, gave himself up to brooding, sent word to Lucy that he was ill, and kept the house for days.

Ill he most certainly was, but in mind and conscience, not in body. One afternoon he sat alone in the parlour of Forest Hall, his head sunk on his breast,



and his eyes burning. The fire had died out, and the hearth was filled with ash, yet, though it was June, he shivered.

Mally Ray, his old nurse and now his housekeeper, had gone off for the day, and left him to fend for himself. On the table lay the remains of a meal, and the atmosphere of the room was heavy, in spite of the sunshine outside, and the chiming of a light wind through the tree-tops of the forest.

He had slept little of late, and his nights had been made hideous by dreams, which belonged neither to the sphere of waking nor sleeping, but beset him when he was only half-conscious; and when reality, instead of being obliterated, was turned into a distortion of the truth,

A vision of old Mistress Lynn and her money-bags haunted him. But he managed to banish it in his clearer moments. No sooner, however, had his will become weakened by weariness, than the vision returned. He spent, or seemed to spend, hours counting the coins, and dropping them into a bag. Through the night, through the day, at unexpected moments, he was possessed by this demon of counting. He felt the cold metal between his fingers, yet his hands were in his empty pockets, or hanging by his side.

He looked round the room, and realised suddenly that the fire was out. Then he got up.

"Sleep," he muttered, "I must sleep or I shall lose my wits," and he flung himself down on a settle.

He closed his eyes. For a while he felt dizzy, tossed up and down upon a sea of darkness, then his brain became illuminated as with fire; he began again to count. One by one he dropped the coins into a bag. He roused himself with a smothered curse, turned



over, and tried to fix his mind upon something else.

He had gone fishing the week before with some of his friends, and they had betted on their probable catch. But he had hooked only two or three little trout, too small to be of any use, so he had flung them back into the mere. Now he heard them fall with a splash, and jingle as they reached the bottom. He seemed to be fishing again, and dropping them over the side of the boat, but sometimes it was a coin he dropped, sometimes a silver-bellied fish. Still he went on counting. The trout and the money were confused in his mind. He knew that he had mixed them up; he knew that he was neither asleep nor awake, and he tried to clear his brain. The effort was painful, he struggled as though fighting with evil powers, but in the end he overcame, yet rose up feeling sick, dazed, and in despair.

The room was dusky. How long had he been lying on the settle? He looked at the clock, and it began to strike the hour of nine. At six he had counted the strokes, since then he had not heard them, yet he had not slept. He must sleep, or he would go mad. He sat staring before him for a minute, then went to the door.

He threaded his way through the deserted passages, where draughts blew upon him from unexpected quarters; some of the rooms were shut up; but others were open, disclosing their emptiness. A grey film of dust seemed to lie on everything, and the evening light, glimmering through the cobwebbed windows, gave a green colour to the air, as though it, even, had gone mouldy with long disuse.

He found Mally Ray returned to the kitchen, and preparing their evening meal. But he refused it.



Mally Ray was a dour-faced Scot, honest, clean, yet with a mind that regarded human affection as a wile of the Evil One, who tried by such a means to entrap the honest Christian to his hurt. In her heart of hearts she loved Joel profoundly, she would have sacrificed her life for him, but she would have thought shame to let him know it. As his nurse she had not spared the rod, for she saw his weaknesses ; now she used her tongue in much the same way. She had a long, cadaverous face, a thin and well-drawn-down upper lip, grey eyes and a high forehead.

“Tidy your hair, lad,” she said, “it makes you look like a wandering Willy.”

He smoothed it down with both hands, accustomed to do what she told him, but he pushed the hound aside that had come whimpering to his knees. It was in bad condition, having had the distemper and lost its fine litter of puppies with the same sickness.

“I’m going out,” he said curtly, “don’t expect me back till you see me.”

She tightened her lip, looking at him with stern eyes.

“I hope you’re going after no foolishness, Master Joel.”

He laughed harshly, turned on his heel, and went away.

Standing by the wall, he gazed down at the trees below him, which were singing in the wind. There was a cool, sweet air, and the scent of damp earth rising from the forest. He thought that he would go and see Timothy Hadwin, and get a sleeping draught. If he were possessed by a devil, as he verily believed he was, Old Camomile would be able to cast it out.

He followed the cart-road for some way, then took the winding path that led to Timothy's cottage. The old man was sitting on the bench by the door, enjoying the calm of the twilight.

"I can't sleep," said Joel.

Timothy looked quietly into his face, saw the lines round his mouth, and the restlessness of his eyes.

"Tell me how you feel," he replied.

"I can't sleep," reiterated Joel; "give me something to make me sleep."

"Come in," said the old man. His living-room was small, but neat and clean. There were rows upon rows of shelves along the walls, filled with jars and bottles; the place smelled of lavender, rosemary, lad's love, and other sweet herbs. He mixed a powder and gave it to the young man, then he made him lie down.

"You must open your mind, my lad," he said, "and let the sweet influences of the night in. Peace floweth about us like a river."

"Not round me! Nothing has ever flowed round me but black waters, and I'm drowning in 'em."

Already he felt the cold waves of which he spoke pressing upon his eyelids so that he could not see. He heard Timothy's voice; it came to him as through a curtain. The old man was talking of peace. What was peace? Was it but the exhaustion of passion, the sinking down of a stormy sea, as waves sink, when the tempest is over? Or was it paralysis of the living soul, which had felt so much that it could feel no more? Or could it be the inflowing of some holy element, that would mingle with his thoughts and purify them? He longed for it, whatever it was. He longed to be quiet, and as he pondered



over the thoughts which Timothy's words had roused, the roaring in his ears subsided, the darkness lightened like the coming of dawn. He imagined that he was lying on golden sand, and gazing up at a river flowing over his head. Peace ! The waters of Peace ! Timothy had said that they flowed through the world, and now he was bathed in them. He heard the river's ripple as it passed ; he felt at rest.

For a few minutes longer the old man talked on, but Joel could not make out what he said, for the words were subdued and mingled with the murmur of the magical river.

"Settled weather has come at last," remarked Timothy, going to the door, and looking at the sky, which was flying with rosy streamers, although so late. But Joel made no reply. He had gone to sleep.

A circle of silence held the cot all through the night. Though the white tails of innumerable rabbits flickered down in the forest, and birds called to each other, and leaves chimed a sylvan chorus, about the purlieus of Timothy Hadwin's abode lay a deep hush. Here nothing stirred ; it was as though an enchantment had fallen.

Joel slept profoundly. The evil spirit that haunted him in the meantime had fled, and left his mind a blank. It was swept and garnished—a place for the Holy Ghost to dwell in, or seven devils.

Daylight had hardly died out of the sky when dawn began. It came with a primrose light in the east, and a fresh wind. All things woke at the passing of the wind. The silence about Timothy's cot snapped, and from each grass-blade rose a sibilant whisper, that, united, sounded like women's skirts sweeping



by. Mint and thyme, lavender, roses and honeysuckle, filled the garden with perfume.

Joel, too, awoke. He was lying upon the settle covered with rugs, with a cushion under his head. At first he could not remember where he was, but gradually the trouble of last night returned. He lay still for a while, thinking how soon another night would be upon him, and dreading the thought of it. He remembered that to-day was his birthday.

He got up. Timothy was not to be seen, but the fire was burning, the kettle singing as it swung by its iron chain over the flames. His own life was very like the kettle, hung by the iron chain of fate over the fires of the world. He sat down to await Timothy's return. He had not the energy, and he did not know if he had the desire, to go away without speaking to him. Besides, another night was coming on, and he dared not see it approach without having by him the medicine that gave sleep.

Yet, although he was a good deal refreshed, the beauty of the summer morning was not for him, for he refused to accept its bounty. He did not smell the eglantine that climbed up the porch of the cot, and scented the air with the most memory-waking of scents ; he did not taste the sweet wind that puffed in his face ; he wet his dry lips and tasted bitterness.

Timothy was some time returning, and Joel, for lack of better occupation, began to puzzle over the mystery of the little man—he remained a mystery in High Fold, though the villagers had long ceased to speculate about it, and had probably forgotten, so many years had he lived among them, that his origin was still unknown. He had arrived one spring-tide, forty years ago, and settled down in this cot. Though



a young man then, his head was silver-white. He lived quietly, received no letters, paid no visits, save to the sick in the neighbourhood—but spent his time gathering herbs, and, when he found an understanding ear, he talked garrulously about his thoughts, but never alluded to his circumstances. He was an educated man, knew many foreign languages, had read many strange books, studied the stars, and believed, to some extent, in astrology. Further than that no one knew about him.

Presently the old man came, wet with dew, and carrying a basket of roots, which he had been digging up in Cringel Forest.

“There’s a virtue in them at dawn,” he said, “that’s gone by the time the sun is high. Everybody who rises at dawn has felt the same virtue in his own body.”

Timothy talked cheerfully, and prepared their morning meal without ever remarking upon the previous night.

“Take an old man’s advice, and a fishing-rod,” he said, “and spend the day on Swirtle Tarn. I’ll come too. It’s a long time since I tempted trout with a bracken clock.”

Soon after breakfast they sallied forth, and went up the dale past Greystones. Even on this June day the house seemed to stand aloof from the sunshine. It looked lonely and out in the cold, like a soul that had withdrawn itself from intercourse with its fellows. The heavy green of the sycamores, now in full leaf, hid the barns.

They kept by the beck-side. The bracken all about them was glittering with beetles—bronzy, golden things, that hung like beads to the fronds. In the distance they saw Barbara; near at hand



Jan Straw was weeding a little patch of cultivated ground with slow, slow fingers.

Silence held the inside of the house as well as the outside. Lucy was baking scones on the girdle, but the curtains of her great-grandmother's bed had not yet been withdrawn.

The old woman kept Midsummer's Day like a fast. In the annals of her life it was marked as a day of doom, a day when her spirit came into touch with the supernatural, when her heart wept tears, though her eyes were dry. Its return each year brought the past back to her, the wild past when adventure came riding to the door, and no one need go out to seek it. Sometimes she could reach back through the dusty years, and feel her flesh grow young and warm, and know that she, and the Annas Lynn of twenty, were one. But at other times, the eyes that she fixed upon those ancient scenes were old and cold, and she failed to make the dry bones live.

One Midsummer's Day in her youth she had stood on the fells and seen a phantom army pass. This happened three years before the rebellion of 1745. Some of the village folk saw the apparition also, but none of them recognised the leader of it, mounted on a black horse. A year later she again saw the phantom army. It seemed to move along the top of the fells—a train of marching men, gun-carriages and baggage. Then the mists came down and hid it.

Next year, Joel Hart—the Jacobite Joel Hart—had led a little company over the hills into Scotland to welcome Prince Charles Edward back to his rightful inheritance. Though another man's wife, Annas Lynn had wept for the handsome cavalier. Months of disaster followed; the haughty lady of Forest Hall



had given birth to a son ; but Culloden had been fought, and there was no hope for the rebels. It was then that the lady came a suppliant to Annas Lynn, whom she had scorned in the past, guessing that more than a kindly feeling lay between her husband and her. But the house was full of soldiers, and Joel had ventured home to see his child before fleeing to France. She prayed that Annas would hide him till the search was over.

For a day and a night he lay hidden in the wool-barn, undetected by even the keen eyes of David Lynn. Then on Midsummer's Eve the Northern Lights had played for an hour above Thundergay as they had played before Lord Derwentwater was beheaded thirty years previously. "Derwentwatter's Leets," the fell-folk had called the aurora since that night. Annas watched the great bars shoot and fade with despair in her heart, for she felt sure that Joel was doomed, and he was shot by soldiers on the lookout for him the following evening.

Upon these scenes the old woman dwelt every Midsummer's Day.

She lay in the four-poster, shut in from distracting sounds and sights by the curtains. Could Lucy have been so bold as to peer between them, many a strange expression flitting across the old face would not only have astonished, but startled her. For her great-grandmother could hate and love with a mighty passion. Sometimes she bore a strange likeness to herself as she had looked when she bade Joel good-bye, and he slipped out of the wool-barn into the dark night. She had been tall and fair in those days—like Barbara—but with a jewel glittering in each eye. Or, again, her face might reflect that look of



misery with which she had watched his dead body being carried past the farm on a spruce-bough early the next morning. Or her expression might change to one that recalled her hatred of David Lynn, her husband, when he had stood by and commended the soldiers for their deed of blood. From that day to this, though he had long been laid in his grave, she thought of him with aversion. She had spurned her children, and her children's children, because they took after him in looks and character. Not till Barbara was born, and another Joel Hart bore the form and features of his ill-fated grandfather, did her heart warm again to human affection.

She remembered that to-day was Joel's birthday. It was one more coincidence, which led her to regard Midsummer's Day with superstition. She looked upon the young man as a message from the other world, and she gave him her blessing. When she died, her wealth was to be divided between him and her great-grandchildren. She knew that he was hard-up now, but money had grown so dear to her, that she could not part with it till she must, even for a lost love's sake. By tortuous paths the human soul travels away from the generous impulses of youth, and reaches, in old age, a place where it had never thought to be !

To-day her memory had been acute, and she had suffered. She felt that she had been consorting with the living and not the dead—though they had died long ago ; three-score years and ten were wiped out.

Pulling back the curtains, she called to Lucy.

“Go down to Forest Hall and tell Joel I want him,” she said.

“He's but now gone up the dale with Timothy Hadwin,” replied Lucy.



“Keep a watch for him returning and bring him in. It’s a long while since he came to Greystones to see the old woman, though, doubtless,” she peered into the girl’s face, “doubtless he’s often been at the bridge philandering with a young one.”

“Indeed, no, you’re mistaken, great-granny.”

It was evening when Joel came, bringing with him half a dozen trout strung on a withy. He found Mistress Lynn in a talkative mood; he caught a glimpse of the white flesh of her youth peeping out from under the hard old mail of age.

She talked to him of his grandfather and the wild times of the Rebellion. She made the past live. She told him how the village was full of soldiers and spies. She pointed to the wool-barn door, at the other side of the passage, and bade him look in, and he would see it now as it was then, with the fleeces piled up, waiting for market-day, but at that time a hunted man was hiding among them.

Barbara, sitting by the window darning, listened intently. The old tale was an *Iliad* to her. She found in it the same elements of greatness, of romance and poetry, as in the stories of Homer. The passions roused were deep passions, the sorrows suffered were real sorrows. Her great-grandmother, the ill-fated man, the lady of Forest Hall, had not lived in vain, for they had felt down to the depths of their natures. This was the essence of true poetry. Barbara thought that, if she had had the learning, and the genius, she would have made an *Iliad* out of the old woman’s story for the fell-folk.

The wool-barn door still stood open. The stone flags, the oaken rafters, the brandereth on the hearth



—the place had always been used for baking and brewing, as well as the storing of fleeces—were the same as those which Joel Hart, the Jacobite, had looked upon among the last things he had seen on earth. Doubtless, during the day and night he had spent there, they had become engraved upon his brain. A man could still hide among the sheep's wool.

Then Mistress Lynn unlocked the bridewain and showed Joel an old horse-pistol with rusty stains upon it—which were his grandfather's blood. In a fit of generosity she gave him a sovereign as a birthday gift.

Joel had listened to her tale with wandering attention. His own troubles were too absorbing for him to give much heed to this story of long ago. Although his mind had recovered its balance, and he was no longer haunted by the fear of going mad, yet it had not gained serenity. He felt that he was choking in a narrow way, and could discover no turning.

The unlocking of the bridewain roused him. He took the sovereign, fingered it restlessly, thinking of the hoard from which it came.

“When I's dead, lad, thee shall have many like it,” said the old woman.

The impulse was on him to tell her, there and then, about the snare into which he had got his feet, to throw himself upon her compassion, and beg for her aid. But he controlled this feeling, for Barbara and Lucy were present, and he was too proud to unburden himself before them.

“It's ill waiting for dead folk's shoes,” said Lucy. “I wish you'd give us some of it to enjoy while you're here to teach us how to spend it aright.”

“Dead folk's shoes, when they're well-lined, are



verra comfortable things to step into, my lass," retorted the old woman, taking no notice of the other part of her petition.

"I'm of Lucy's opinion," said Joel. "I'd have great pleasure in drinking your health with it now, great-granny."

She looked up with a certain suspicious light in her eyes.

"You've got a sovereign," she said coldly; "how many more do you want?"

He laughed uneasily.

"As many as your kind heart could spare a poverty-stricken fellow like me."

"In good time, my lad, all in good time."

Barbara also lifted her eyes and gave the young man a long and serious look; then she dropped them without comment.

Joel smiled sourly. If Mistress Lynn's money was to do him any good, he must have it now. Later would be too late.

Timothy Hadwin had cast out the evil spirit with which he had been possessed. He had wakened in the morning free from its baleful influence, but he had neglected to fill its vacant place with a better one. He had let himself drift. All through the day the old man had striven to rouse him, but he could make nothing of Joel. His mood varied from flippant to sullen, but a serious interest in, or a manly attitude towards life, he seemed to be incapable of attaining.

Now he sat gazing on the bridewain, thinking of what it contained, and wondering if Mistress Lynn would lend him some money. But even as the thought passed through his mind, he dismissed it. She would want to know all about his ways and means, his follies

and sins ; she would search the most secret places of his heart if he once gave her the opportunity, and there was much he would be ashamed for any eye to see.

The old woman sent him to the spring to bring her a mug of fresh water, for she was thirsty. As he stood in the gloaming with the dark farm buildings all about him, and the sycamores shuffling overhead, and the water gurgling at his feet, his eyes burnt, and he wetted his dry lips with his tongue. He filled the mug and drank, filled it a second time and drained it again. He was assailed by temptation. Could he not, by some means, anticipate the old woman's decree concerning the disposal of her money ? A third of it was to be his—she had said so. Could he not have it now ? It profited her nothing laid up in blue linen bags. It would bring salvation to him. The matter was not difficult to accomplish. Fate seemed to have thrown the chance at him, nay, had prepared it and laid it before him ready to be carried out. He had a sleeping-draught in his pocket which Timothy Hadwin had given him. The old man had been reluctant, but he had insisted. If he dropped it into the cup of water, Mistress Lynn would drink it without thinking. And if she did discover a faint, curious taste, she would imagine it due to the state of the spring, grown round as it was with water-weeds. He could hide, as his grandfather had done, among the fleeces, and then, when night came, and Barbara and Lucy were safe asleep upstairs, what could be easier than to slip out and open the bridewain unnoticed and unheard ? He had seen Mistress Lynn hide the key under her pillow.

He put the idea from him with distaste : even



though he promised himself that he would take no more than his share, that he would repay it some day, he could not help feeling it a cowardly act for a man to contemplate and that man the master of Forest Hall.

He filled the cup and returned towards the house. But on the way he paused. The darkness of his future appalled him ; he was undone if he could not meet those debts of honour. Where could he hope to get the money if not here ? And such a chance was not likely to come his way again. He had no time to argue the whole question over once more : he had been away too long already.

Mistress Lynn drank the water unsuspectingly. Old Camomile was too wise to put the powerful drug he had given Joel the night before into such weak hands. The young man was strong, and would sleep soundly enough, when he learnt to regulate his life like a Christian gentleman.

## CHAPTER VII

### MIDNIGHT

“GREAT-GRANNY has been very generous—for her,” said Lucy, as she bade Joel good-night in the copse below the house. “Fancy her giving you a whole sovereign ! Doesn’t it make you feel rich ? I wish she’d give me one ! ”

“All in good time, Lucy, all in good time,” he replied, mimicking the old woman’s voice.

“She was sharp, wasn’t she, when we hinted we’d like to have some of her money to spend now ? But you’re not as badly off as you say, eh, Joel ? ”

“I told you my luck was changing,” he answered somewhat irritably, but he would not meet her eyes, for although it was too dark for them to see each other clearly, he fancied that she might be able to read his mind.

“I’m so glad, Joel, and—and great-granny’s very old ! ” She was half afraid to utter words which implied a wish that she dared not express.

“She’ll be older still before she dies,” said he, then added as a second thought, “I shouldn’t wonder if she buried us first. Death seems to forget the old folk sometimes, and to take the young instead.”

Lucy turned away ; tears rushed to her eyes ; she forced them back.



What was wrong with Joel to-night? She had not seen him for a week, and had been longing to hear him say that he had missed her desperately. But he seemed to be preoccupied and answered her enquiries after his health in an off-hand manner; his bearing was no longer gay, but distant. Saying good-night she went back to Greystones.

Joel let her go with the customary embrace, but she felt no warmth in it. She was hurt at his indifference, and paused, when she reached the garden, to compose her features before meeting the eyes of her great-grandmother, who believed that she was in the dairy turning cheeses. She thought of his handsome face and form, and then her resentment sank. She dared not lose him; she could not contemplate a quarrel; if she entered the house now and shut the door upon her present feelings, she would be also shutting up sorrow in her heart. She wondered whether she were to blame: whether she had failed in sympathy and understanding. Perhaps she had been cold, and he was hurt as well as she.

Lucy plucked a half-opened rose and returned, meaning to run after him if he had gone home. But he was still standing in their meeting place, hidden by the trees.

“I couldn’t leave you so, Joel,” she murmured, twining her fingers in his. “I shouldn’t sleep to-night if I thought you had any cause to be angry with me. Have I done aught amiss?”

He put his arms round her, roused to a show of affection by her voice. He cared for her deeply, but there were times when he found her love exacting, when he could not reach the heights whereon she stood. The fault lay in himself. It lay in his heart,



which was so weighted by anxiety, that he often had not the energy to climb up beside her.

“Yes,” he said with a return to his usual manner, “you’ve done one thing amiss—you’ve grown so deucedly pretty that you’ve left me neither a calm heart nor a clear head to manage my worldly affairs.”

Lucy laughed, and pinned the rose-bud into his coat, reassured at his words. She was happy again, happy as a flower drinking in the dew. The beck sang of tranquillity; the trees were kindly souls, making a bower for him and her; the darkness was a soft green curtain shutting out the world and prying eyes.

They lingered a while without speaking—she thinking only of him, he distracted by his own thoughts. Then she went away.

He saw her go with a feeling of relief. Now he would have quietness in which to measure his intentions and understand himself. When the glimmer of her cotton frock had vanished up the path, he sat down to contemplation. He had not yet made up his mind what to do: he had deferred his decision—so he thought—until this moment, because he wished to face it squarely. He would not have his mind entrapped by some subtle move of the hand of chance. But he was only deceiving himself. In the silence of the copse, with the singing water to take the intensity off a silence which would have distracted him, he found that he had no decision to make. The contest had been fought in his innermost being by manœuvres which he was barely aware of. It had gone on, as it were, under cover of a veil that he had drawn between his consciousness and his nature.

Later on he walked back to Greystones. He still half-heartedly hoped that the door of the wool-barn



would be barred, or that the dogs would announce his coming, and so make his projected plan impossible. But no one saw him, the latch lifted lightly—Barbara had not yet locked up for the night.

Waiting was tedious. His head swam with the heat, for he was obliged to hide himself under the fleeces : the blood sang in his ears, and throbbed at his wrists. Barbara passed with a candle, and shot to the bolts ; darkness closed down. He flung off the coverings, and sank upon the wool-bales, nursing his chin. His heart began to beat like a hammer ; he thought that someone would surely hear it.

The darkness danced. It was alive with threads of light wriggling past him into the corners of the barn. He began to wish that he had not come. To be sure he could unbolt the door, and slip away unseen and unheard. But then he would lose his chance. That which he really desired was some outside power to decide for him, either a voice audibly commanding, or a superhuman hand forcibly withholding him. But nothing of this kind happened. The way was smoothed. It seemed as though the powers above man had planned the enterprise, and were egging him on to fulfil it.

He wished that he had a light. The darkness was disconcerting with those wriggling streaks of fire. He heard the kitchen clock chiming the quarters and the half-hours, and when it struck twelve, he crept into the passage. He listened, but there was no sound within. Then he gently lifted the sneck and entered.

Mistress Lynn was just turning away from lighting a candle. She was sitting up in bed, and looked round at the sound. Their eyes met.

For a moment they stared at each other—the man confused, the old woman astonished, a look which



swiftly turned to that expression of suspicion, with which she had regarded him earlier in the evening. Then she clasped her hands on her lap, and leaned back against the pillows.

“I’s pleased to see thee, Joel Hart,” she said. “Surely it’s sommat pressing that’s brought thee up to Grey-stones at this hour !”

He did not reply ; endeavoured to meet her glance with one as lofty ; failed miserably, and moved to the door, putting into his action a boldness which he did not feel.

“ Sit down, lad,” she said. “ Come in, Joel. Thee needn’t fear the old woman ; she wunna bite.”

Mistress Lynn smiled, but bitterly.

“ I’m going,” he replied, “ good-night.”

“ Nay, nay, let’s have a crack, Joel. Shut the door.”

Her voice held him. He glanced at her, but could make nothing of that grim, inscrutable face. He did not know what to do. If he went away he would still have to give an explanation of this untimely visit ; it seemed better to stay and face the difficulty now ; invent a likely motive—if he could.

“ It’s late,” he said, “ hadn’t we better wait for a more seasonable opportunity to have a crack ? ”

“ What didst say ? ” she asked, putting her hand behind her ear. “ I’s getting deaf, lad, breaking up, losing my sight, and my hearing, and my wits, too, it seems. I’s an old woman, Joel. How old art thou ? Twenty-five ! It’s good to be twenty-five ! It’s a wise, pleasant age to be ! ”

Her voice was growing scornful.

“ An age for sowing wild oats, and gathering apples off other folks trees, eh ? Haven’t you a word to say ? ” she continued. “ Haven’t you a reason to give



for coming to see me ? Lost thy tongue, hasta ? Well, well, I's pleased and proud it's me you've come to see ; me, the great-grandmother, and not one of the lasses upstairs. Step hither to the bedside, lad, till I see thee better."

Unable to understand the old woman's words, but hoping that his purpose might escape undetected, Joel did as she bade him, swaggering somewhat, and curtaining his real feelings with a smile.

She gripped him with her skinny hands.

" Oh, thee's a fine make of a man," she said, her voice changing ; " thee's a man indeed, a handsome, pleasant-spoken young man and a virtuous one."

She shook him with her rising passion.

" Didst think to find me asleep ? " she asked. " Didst think to pluck the bonny golden apples out o' my hand ? I never sleep, lad, leastways, not at night. And this night—wouldst like to know where I've been—eh ? "

She paused to give point to her words.

" I've been with your grandfather. And you're blood of his blood and bone of his bone ! Ah ! he should have married me, though I was but a statesman's lass, and not heiress to a fine house. I'd have given him children worthy of him—lads that would have held their heads high, and walked with honest folk, and just folk, and proud folk—too proud to soil their souls with their hands. It's your lady grandmother that's polluted you, Joel, so you can't help it. Poor lad, poor lad—the spring was poisoned before you were born ! "

Her voice softened, and she looked at him more kindly.

" You might have trusted me, Joel," she said.



“ You should have been straight with me, asked in the name of your grandfather, I’d have listened for his sake.”

He muttered something about her hard nature.

“ Hard ! ” she replied. “ Aye, I’s hard, but iron melts. I’d have melted like a bit of beeswax, if you’d been strong and true and wise enough to come to me with a straight story. It’s them crooked ways of folk I can’t abide. Why didn’t you—eh ? ”

She pushed him suddenly away.

“ You’ve a bad heart, Joel, though you’ve the face of your grandfather, and he was the handsomest man in the dales. You’ve got his name too—Joel Hart ! Joel Hart ! A young lass once thought it was the sweetest music in the world ! Shame on you, shame on you for bringing a stain on it ! ”

“ It was stained before I got it,” he replied ; he was not one to take his deserts meekly. “ His own country shot him for a rebel ! ”

“ That’s an ill jibe,” she cried, shaking her clenched fist at him, then fell back upon her pillows unable to continue, but glaring like a wounded wild thing.

He felt that some apology, some explanation must be made.

“ I’m sorry, Mistress Lynn,” he began, “ I never meant, I didn’t mean——”

“ Well,” she gasped, “ is that all ; you didn’t mean—what ? ”

He straightened himself, looked the old woman full in the face. He was not a thief ; he had wandered from the straight path ; but the crooked way was not to his liking ; it abounded in pitfalls, so he forsook it.

“ I own I’ve done wrong,” he said with manly sincerity. “ I was mad. Life has made me mad. It



has frustrated all my hopes ; it has put all its bad eggs into my basket. I lost my head in a weak moment. But that's over now. I shall not stumble again. If you've any heart to understand a man, you'll let me go now and ask no more."

His appeal touched Mistress Lynn to the quick. She wiped her brow, and hid her trembling old mouth with the edge of the sheet.

That ancient love which could not go out, though it might suffer an eclipse, began to shine again, and slowly illuminated her features, like an inner light. A cry that came from the soul had power to stir her. Deep called unto deep.

The door opened and Barbara entered. She had heard the voices, and come down to learn the meaning of them. A shepherd's plaid of black and white check was thrown over her shoulders, and her hair hung in a glistening mass. The clearness of her face was like the coming of moonlight out of clouds. She stood on the threshold, looking from Joel to the old woman, then closing the door, moved to the four-poster.

"Dost need me, great-granny ?" she asked.

Barbara's sudden entrance into that intense atmosphere caused a change to work among the elements, just as a wind rising on a sultry day, may mean the coming of storm, or the freshening of the weather.

Joel was not sure whether to be glad or sorry. He looked at her in awe as a benighted traveller might look at a snow peak, which the rising moon all at once revealed towering overhead. He felt himself to be little better than a clod of earth in her presence.

To her great-grandmother Barbara's coming was a relief. The old woman had received a blow, and however bravely she might hide the wound, she could



not stanch its inward bleeding. For once she was glad to shift responsibility from her own to younger shoulders.

“ Sit thee down, Barbara,” she said, “ Joel’s in sore trouble, and he has come to me. Very right and proper of him ! For who else should he come to but his grandfather’s old friend ? Yet I don’t ken what to do. Tell thy tale, my lad, but tell no more than a young lass’s ears may hear.”

She shot a warning look at him under her shaggy brows, and he understood that she meant to keep to herself the knowledge of his unworthy intentions. He thanked her by a grip of the hand, overwhelmed by the forbearance she showed, which was as unexpected as it was gracious in so masterful a soul. The meaning lay much deeper than he could probe. It lay in the foundations of her nature—foundations of goodness and love, although nearly a hundred years of building had raised over them a superstructure, grim and narrow.

He told his story. It was a story of adverse circumstances acting upon a mind too indolent to do battle with them. Barbara listened with interest and sympathy. Her life upon the mountains, her isolation,—for her character was little understood by those nearest and dearest to her—had made her a student of other people. She read their reasons and acts with a clearness of vision unusual in one of little worldly experience. But experience is not always knowledge. It was her own heart, with its possibilities for good and evil, her own nature, curbed on every side, that gave her insight into and understanding of life. Meditation had taught her to know herself, and so given her a key with which to open the secret doors of other souls.



She read Joel's mind. It lay before her like an open book. Written upon it was a tale of right desires and intentions, that had come to nought for lack of a will to guide them. He did not speak of his love for her sister, but she found it interwoven with the tale. She thought of Lucy as she had seen her but a little while ago, lying asleep, with her hair unbound, and her white arms thrown over the quilt, as pure a soul as breathed. Then she glanced at Joel, and recollected that the door of the wool-barn stood open, which she had shut before going to bed. Though she could not follow that clue through all its phases, she read enough to waken suspicions. This man, with the fine face and form, the dark, well-shapen eyes, but the irresolute mouth had won her sister's affection. And what did he propose to do with it? The protecting instinct was strong in Barbara; it rose up like that of a lioness to stand between its young one and danger. Though she was only a year older than Lucy, in power to endure she was as a beech tree to the wind-flower at its foot.

She pitied Joel, she had a warm place in her heart for him; she had seen him do many a kind action; his generosity and improvidence had largely added to his present desperate condition; but her sympathy was tempered with severity. There is no severity colder and more relentless than that of the young.

"You must go away, Joel," she said, for she knew that there was not any hope for him unless he could cut himself adrift from his companions—those young men who wasted their substance with riotous living.

"Go away?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, away, abroad, out into the world, where chances and plenty wait for men, great chances. Life



will lie before you there, Joel, and you can make it something better than you've made it here."

"Away!" he repeated in astonishment. Was this girl proposing to settle his plans for him? He glanced at her haughtily. He had never thought of going away, and he would not think of it now, unless something good appeared to be in store. Hitherto his world had been bounded by Forest Hall and Lucy Lynn, and that which lay beyond was uncoloured by his imagination. He did not desire a wider sphere of action.

"You've got your feet in a bog, Joel," continued Barbara, "and you'll go down till your soo'ed in it, unless you walk another way. Great-granny, give him money and send him abroad—to America—where the bulls and rams go, and men make their fortunes . . . ." She paused for a moment, then fixed her large blue eyes full upon his face—"and get strength to feed themselves on."

The old woman nodded her head. The idea pleased her. For his grandfather's sake she would do this thing, would part with some of her money, and give Joel a chance of making an honourable future for himself. Then he could come back, pay his debts, and live in a manner fitting the master of Forest Hall.

Joel looked at the faces of the two women confronting him. Their likeness to each other just now was marked. But upon the face of the great-grandmother he saw the ghost of a smile—a sad one it is true—but Barbara, young and glorious in her strength, was as inexorable as a judge. His heart sank. These two women held his future in their hands. He was forced to recognise as much. From no one else could he get help save from them, and they would bestow it as



they thought fit. If he refused to accept it, then he must go and—drown.

They were like priestesses, demanding a sacrifice if he would be saved. On the fells above High Fold rose a circle of upright stones surrounding a huge slab, which popular tradition said was a Druid's altar. Barbara and her aged kinswoman might be a reincarnation of that dark faith which demanded blood, human blood to appease its gods. He had sinned, they asked for his life as a recompense: and they meant to have it. If he went away, cut himself off from Forest Hall, Lucy and his friends, it would be like tearing out his heart.

“You must go, Joel,” said Barbara.

Must he? He thought of the great roads of the world leading into the Unknown. He thought of them with distaste. He did not want adventure: he wanted money. He felt no thrill at the idea of fighting his way up to success; he was a gentleman, and all that he desired was the means to live as such. If he went it would be because he had no other hope.

That which he had before wished was now coming to pass. By the irony of fate he was being forced in a direction which he had no inclination to travel. He thought of Lucy sleeping in the room over the rafters—of her dusky hair, red lips, closed eyes—eyes so bright that he had often called them his guiding stars; must he leave them, leave all those charms that belonged to him, which she gave him freely and without stint?

“I'll go,” he said suddenly, “I'll go, but I'll take Lucy with me.”

“Lucy'll stay where she is,” replied the old woman sharply.

Barbara strode forward, with a steady fire burning in her eyes, and an august lift of her head. She laid a firm hand on the young man's shoulder and made him look at her.

"Joel Hart," she said, "is your love a true love?"

"Before God, it is," he said solemnly.

"And you seek her happiness?"

"Above everything."

"Above your own, Joel?"

He did not answer for a moment. Barbara's glance, which never turned away from a sight until it had revealed all that she wanted to see, held him in a kind of mesmerism. Then he dropped his eyes; he could not lie in her face.

"I meant her no harm, I meant no wrong," he said bitterly. "But she's all I've got in the world to love me."

He would like to have spoken openly about his feelings, of his sense of Lucy's goodness and purity, of his readiness to die for her, of the glow she had shed upon his cold life. But he was tongue-tied, for Barbara had stripped his heart naked, and his own eyes condemned it.

He longed to get away from this stern judge. There seemed to be nothing more left for him to do but go away.

"You're both very kind," he said hoarsely. "You mustn't be hurt that I can't thank you as I ought to-night. Perhaps I shall some day. I see it's better that I should leave the dale; for Lucy's sake, if not for mine. She's safe for me, Barbara. I'll leave her free, and never ask for word or token unless I can marry her."

Barbara unbarred the door, and he passed out. It



was a clear night, the summer stars were shining but faintly, as the dawn was not far off.

The girl was deeply moved. She could not know, it is true, that by forcing Joel to act in this way she was setting the seal to the tragedy of her own life. But she realised that the man was suffering, and that his sacrifice was a sacrifice indeed. Tears filled her eyes.

“Joel,” she whispered, “this is your chance; hold fast to it, set your feet firm.”

The night air cooled the heated brow of the man, and the dusk was a welcome curtain to his feelings. As he looked at Barbara, before going down the path to the gate, it seemed to him that her face was no longer that of the inexorable judge, but the face of a saint. He had been on the point of hating her—he would have hated her had his passion not been spent, and left him too exhausted to feel any more. Now he again realised the greatness of her heart. He knew that come what might come to Barbara Lynn—the thorny crown and the roughest road—she would walk with just such an expression in her eyes as she had now. Her look met his and poured into him the fresh spirit of the mountains. He felt lifted up and renewed at the centre of his being.

“Heaven help me, Barbara,” he said, standing bare-headed, “some day I’ll come back for Lucy.”

## CHAPTER VIII

### JOEL GOES AWAY

LUCY lay upon the fell-side, face down in the grass, hidden by the bracken fronds. The sun was setting, and the mountains were suffused with a rosy haze. Over the roof of Forest Hall, on the other side of the dale, rooks were flying home.

About the recumbent figure pee-weeps wheeled, making a piteous calling, and the hill-pastures were tremulous with the bleating of sheep, for the flocks had just been shorn. But Lucy heeded neither sound nor sunset; the world about her seemed to be as silent and dark as her own soul.

Joel had bidden her good-bye. To-morrow he was going away—and so far away: to America. Once she had not been able to think of parting without despair, but now she knew how willingly she would bear it, if they might only part as lovers. Joel stood firm. Her entreaties and tears had no effect; he was kind; he was also self-righteous. He had never meant to tie her to him, he said; he had no right to ask for her love, when he could not marry her; he had done her a great wrong; further wrong he would not do.

“When you’ve made your fortune, you’ll come back, Joel?” she had whispered.

Then had descended upon him a sullen cloud. The



exaltation, which he had felt in Barbara's presence, vanished ; he no longer breathed the clear, invigorating air that had roused him to the strong resolve—"Heaven help me ! I'll return for Lucy." He felt angry, because his hand had been forced, because his plans had miscarried, because he had put himself in the power of two women ; and, looking at the drooping form of the girl whom he loved, though she was innocent, he felt glad that he had the power to hurt her.

"Back !" he had said, "back ! Few that go away come back."

The words were no sooner uttered than he had repented of them. The girl had shrunk back as though struck, and he had been tempted to clasp her in his arms, to vow that he would return, and marry her, if she would only wait for him. But, remembering his promise, he had refrained. He would not be so dastardly a soul as to ask for something he might never be able to have. Lucy was very fair, gentle, and kind ; his love had brought her little happiness ; he would not blight her future. She should not wear his fetters, she should be free. If luck took sides with him ; if she remained true to her heart, then the last word had not been spoken between them. But if he found only his old bad fortune dogging his steps in a foreign land—which he fully expected—and she grew weary of waiting ; then this good-bye was good-bye for ever.

He was going off at dawn. Lucy had seen the last of him, and the future lay before her like a desolate plain, upon which no hopeful star rose to lighten the monotony. Just now, however, her mind ignored it, and, gripping the present, hugged it close to extract its utmost bitterness.



She did not understand Joel, but she was conscious that he had steeled his heart against her, that his handsome, haughty face was determined not to relax into its old, loving, intimate look, with which he used to regard her. He was going away, where he would meet many pretty women, prettier than she, who would feel the charm of his fine manners and handsome presence, and who would be only too eager to take his heart captive.

Lucy knew nothing about Joel's untimely visit to her great-grandmother in the middle of the night. Neither did she know that the old woman had given him money. The events, which led up to his sudden determination to go away, were hidden in obscurity, and his attitude towards her made it impossible to enquire further. She thought that he was acting wisely, in all but his newly assumed consideration for her. She wanted to have the right to think of him, encourage him, dream of him ; she wanted, in fact, to be sure that he would remain hers when he got beyond the reach of her influence. He had said that she must be free. Free ! the word was a mockery ! She had given herself to him. But now he returned the gift, which he had once pleaded for ! Was it, then, he who desired to be free ? Her breast was torn with the hard sobbing of outraged affection.

Unable to bear her loneliness any longer, though shrinking from the chance of meeting someone, she got up and looked round her. Dusk had fallen ; the pee-weeps were still flying overhead ; the undersides of their bodies glimmered in the gloom ; all the glitter had died out of the sky ; and Forest Hall looked grey and frowning above its sea of green.



Lucy pushed her hands through her hair, ordered her dress, which had become disarranged with lying on the ground, and then she went slowly down hill. She had no clear idea what she wanted to do, but her feet took her to Forest Hall. She would, at least, feast her eyes upon the lamp-light from his window, if she might not look upon his face. It was the last time she would see him for many years, perhaps for ever. A shudder swept over her as she thought how his form would slowly vanish from her memory. Could she keep the intensity of this hour with her till she died, it would be some comfort through the desolate life which lay before her. But she knew, she had often been told, that the heart sooner or later forgot, that wounds always closed, that the mind grew indifferent, and would some day be able to look back wonderingly upon itself as it had once suffered. The fear of these things befalling her became like a nightmare. She cried out against them. She felt that she could live, so long as she might continue to feel ; but life, grown insensible to that which it had once cherished, was as dreadful a thought as no life at all beyond the grave.

She came to the rock upon which Forest Hall was built and looked up. Its remoteness chilled her. She paused, then walked some steps away. She wanted to see Joel again, to reassure herself that the fears which beset her were untrue. But if she went to the door and knocked, what could she say ? Had she not said all that was possible for a woman ? Must she not keep silent now unless he spoke ? Ah ! the bitterness of her sex ! Had she been the man, she would have surrounded the soul that she loved with a wall of fire. It should never have stood in doubt,



wondering if it might warm its hands. Love would have compassed it.

She drew back into the undergrowth and sat down. The place was damp, and smelled earthy, but she gave no heed. Here she would stay and watch for Joel's passing by. She would stay till dawn, if he did not come sooner, in the hope of seeing some look upon his face that would give her comfort. She did but crave a crumb to assuage the hunger of her heart.

Lucy's despair had a deeper cause than Joel's departure. At the back of her mind lay a thought, from which she would not draw the face-cloth to see what kind of features it bore. It had lain there for months—a corpse-like thing—having the power to throw a gloom over her brightest moments. Had it not been for this baleful influence she could have dried her tears with hopes for the future. She would have acquiesced in his decision that she must be free, believing him only the more worthy of her love for having made it; would have smiled bravely at the lonely years that must pass before he could come back. But her mind was turned into a charnel-house by that ghastly thing, which she would not bring to the light.

It was fear.

Had she been wise and strong enough to look at it, she would have known that below her love for this man was the apprehension that his beauty of face and form held a shallow soul; that his sincerity was a thin sheet of gilt over a hollow heart; that he was but a slender reed, which would break if too heavy a weight were put upon it. But she loved, she worshipped, she refused to see her idol's feet of clay. And the result became that which she was trying to escape—a tormented mind.



The forest lay silent. She could still hear the bleating of sheep on the fells, and the crying of the peewees. But under the dark blue shadow of the trees nothing moved save a sheaf of flag leaves growing in a ditch beside the road. After a little while Jake, the rat-catcher, came along, leading Peter's big brown bear, which he had taken out for exercise. The thin little man and the ungainly beast passed up the path to the house on the crag, then the curtain of silence fell again, only lifted for a moment by the return of Jake alone. He did not see Lucy, and went home through the forest playing upon his flute.

She wondered what time it was! She began to feel cold and thought that she would not have the courage to stay there all night. Besides Barbara, or the hind, or Jan Straw would soon come to look for her, and they would come first to Forest Hall. She got to her feet meaning to go home.

Then a window was thrown open far over her head, and the loud laughing of men went jarring above the tree-tops. Some of Joel's friends, from the country around, had ridden over to see him off and wish him god-speed. He was making merry, while she was eating her own heart with hunger. She wavered, took a step forward, then a step back, hesitated, but, in the end, impelled by a stronger power than her own, she crept up to the house, and looked in at a window.

The room was lit with many candles, burning with long red tongues, and much smoke. They shone upon pewter mugs, rough heads, and jocular faces. Not a man among the lot could match Joel in bearing or grace of countenance. He stood in the middle of them, with a tankard held high, for he had just called a toast. She had not been in time to hear



what he had said, but she saw the smile run from lip to lip, and heard again the loud laughing.

She sank down on the grass under the window. So this was all that Joel cared ! She felt that he had torn out her heart, and flung it still fluttering in her face. He could amuse himself with his companions, finding a time for mirth upon his last night in Forest Hall ; he could blot her out of his thoughts with jests and singing.

As a matter of fact Joel was thinking of her, and the toast which he had called was to ' the lass of his heart.' It was not his nature to be stiff, when others were genial, or pull a long face in the faces of his friends.

But to-night he was in a reckless mood. He had torn himself away from the hands that would have held him ; he had been forced to wound the woman he loved ; he was afraid to meditate upon his present frame of mind or the future upon which he was entering. He craved for distraction, and was grateful to his friends for providing it. He was ready to enter into any wild scheme that would make the night spin and the morning come before he had time to realize what it meant.

Lucy lay stricken upon the ground ; she could not tear herself away. Chilling vapours rose and numbed her limbs. But behind her eyes she felt flames. At times she was seized with fits of shivering. She knew that it was dangerous for her to lie there for a heavy dew was falling—the points of her hair hung with drops, which, now and then, rolled down her neck into her bosom. But she wished that she might die, she wished that the morning could find her stiff and stark under the window, with her sightless eyes gazing



up at the room, where Joel had spent the night in merriment. And above all she wished that he might come there in the dawn, and find her. She wanted him to carry away the eternal reproach of a dead girl's face.

This is that which she desired, and the scene which she saw with the vividness of delirium. His horse stood ready saddled and bridled, his gay companions were lounging in the doorway, he was about to mount when his eyes fell upon her body half hidden by the grass. She felt the hush that would follow his cry of horror. She saw the remorse upon his face, the clenching of his hands, the sweat on his brow. With grim satisfaction she lingered over the scene. Then her mind wandered on. She thought that she followed him into distant lands. She saw him alone in great forests, alone on wide prairies, alone in solitary huts, but never alone, because her dead face would be peering into his. She saw him in crowded cities, in drinking bars, in dancing halls, and even there her dead eyes would blot out the light of other faces. He should never escape her, she would follow him and haunt him until in death they met again. Then she would show him the love and forgiveness of her heart.

Yes, all that she had dreamed would come to pass. Soon she would die, even now her limbs were dead, only her heart lived and her eyes burned. But before she died she would look at him once more.

She raised herself with difficulty, and stared into the room. It was empty, most of the candles had gutted out, the remains of food were scattered here and there, the mugs lay about, as though they had been emptied in a hurry and dropped. For a moment she leaned against the stone, trying to recollect herself, for she was dazed with hunger and cold and



sorrow ; then she groped her way round the house to the back, where she heard voices.

Joel stood in the yard among his friends with half-a-dozen snarling dogs. The moon was rising and she could see him clearly. But she kept behind an outhouse so that no one should spy her. The knot of figures broke up into groups, and in the vacant spot Peter Fleming's bear stood, chained to the pump. It growled, dogs snapped, men laughed and whips were cracked.

Lucy looked on aghast. Was she dreaming ? Was the scene a painting of her own imagination or was it real life ? Did Joel stand near her, gazing at the bear-baiting, sometimes with reluctance—as though his heart was not in it—and then with gradually growing excitement ? Lucy's mind was unstrung. All that she saw and heard came to her as through a mist. She tried to rally herself, to get a grip of something that would bring her senses back. Her hand passed up and down the stone wall of the outhouse beside which she crouched, and finding a big rusty nail, she clung to it as a drowning man might cling to a spar. It gave her support.

The yard into which she gazed was a chaos. Men with whips and snarling dogs circled about the pump. Limbs and bodies seemed to be tied together in a knot that heaved and heaved in an attempt to undo itself and could not. Lucy thought it was a nightmare. She dared not move, dared hardly breathe, like one, who, in sleep, is subjugated by dreadful visions.

But a change came over the barbaric revelry. The men surged aside, the dogs were lashed off and flew howling to the rear. Lucy wondered what had happened, feeling a vague relief, as though a weight had



been lifted from her brain. She swept her eyes round the yard. Surely her sister stood yonder ! Barbara it must be, for the form was that of a woman though as tall as the tallest man. She stood in the clearing by the bear, whose growling still continued to make a thunderous undertone to the shriller sounds of men and dogs.

The sight of her sister brought a breath of life to the stricken girl. She had felt as though she were dying, but not peacefully as those who are willing to lay down existence should die. Her path had been haunted by evil shapes and visions. The Valley of the Shadow was as Pilgrim found it—"full of hobgoblins, satyrs, and dragons of the pit, overhung with the discouraging clouds of confusion." Barbara's coming dispelled the horror. It was the visitation of an angel. From Lucy's distracted mind the vapours cleared. She could think and see clearly again.

She looked round for Joel ; he had gone in with his friends. Only Barbara remained to see to the bear and Mally Ray, sour and stern, came out to help her.

Then Lucy got to her numbed feet, and crept forward. " Barbara," she whispered, " Barbara."

Her sister turned.

" Why, lass," she said calmly, " I's been looking for thee high and low. Come home, Lucy, come away home."

The girl clung to her with both hands, sobbing :

" I's been baited like yon beast, Barbara. Oh ! I's wounded and sick and weary. I's been hurt by the hands I kissed, and life's dark as a cloudy night."

## CHAPTER IX

### PETER AT OXFORD

PETER FLEMING sat by his study window, looking down into the quadrangle. It was early morning, so early that stars still glimmered round Saint Mary the Virgin's spire and over the Radcliffe Camera. Candles burnt dimly in the room at his back, and on the table, spotted with wine stains, lay the remains of supper. All the guests, but one, had gone, and he was only a voice, for the window curtains swallowed him up. To him Peter unburdened his soul; upon such an occasion, at such an hour as this, men are not afraid to speak of themselves.

Peter's college career was ended. Last night he had set the seal to it; this morning he was entering upon a new phase.

"You are not ambitious," said the voice—a mature voice, lacking the boyish note that rang so triumphantly off Peter's tongue, as though he were confident of conquering the world—"It's a pity; I always thought you were! With your honours it's monstrous, that you should turn school-master to your native vale, content with—how much?"

"'Passing rich on forty pounds a year'—and a goosegate!"

"My dear fellow! it won't buy your books."



“ I shall read the book of mother Earth.”

“ Sentimental rubbish ! Is your mind quite made up ? ”

“ Screwed to the sticking point.”

The voice was silent for a moment, then continued :

“ So you’ll spend your days teaching the young to make pot-hooks ! Are you going to succeed ? ”

“ The truth is, I think a little reflection will be good for me.”

“ Reflection ! What upon ? ”

“ Life.”

“ Can’t you reflect upon life without burying yourself first ? ”

“ My friend, you have never been among the mountains.”

“ Conclusive ! I haven’t. I’ve only seen them from afar, and been chilled by them. But seriously, why didn’t you accept that post in India ? You were just the man for it—strong, honest, clever. . . .”

“ Don’t catalogue my virtues, my good fellow.”

“ But why didn’t you go ? ”

“ I’m the only son of my mother.”

“ Hum . . . a man’s foes. . . . And if you return home now, what will you do eventually ? I don’t suppose village school-mastering will satisfy you long.”

“ Eventually ! heaven knows. Perhaps I shall turn flute player up and down the countryside, go to all the fairs and markets and wakes and enjoy myself. Or I might become a potter, or a tinker, or make a modest income leading about a dancing bear. I’ve a predilection for the last.”

“ You’re too versatile, Fleming. But I’m really troubled about you ! That country of your’s is a savage place—I make due apologies—nevertheless it’s

the truth. You'll get into a back-water of life ; you'll be cut off from culture and learning—things you like, and long for, more than most,—I'm afraid that the lump will leaven you, not you the lump."

Peter put away his half-bantering tone, and became serious.

" I've had a good time here," he said. " If I weren't convinced that regret is a weed, which flourishes with the smallest encouragement, and chokes many and better things, I'd regret that it's over. Like Father Thames I've been mightily pleased to lap the stones of Oxford, and give no thought to the changes lower down, or the ultimate submergence in the salt sea."

" You're heir to a considerable patrimony, aren't you, Fleming ? "

" I do not care about money," he replied without affectation.

" Lucky dog ! that's a pinnacle of virtue to which I have never attained. Still money is an asset worth considering."

" My father has saved, I believe ; how much, I don't know—he's given me all I ever asked for without stint. I can surely give him a year of my life in return and not grumble. Still, of course, India attracted me. But it would have broken his heart, his and my mother's, if I'd gone."

" Your folk wanted you to enter the Church, didn't they ?—dedicated you, like Samuel, to the Lord, before you were born ! "

" Yes."

Peter did not enlighten his friend further. He was not able to think without pain of his parents' grief, when he had told them that he could not fulfil their wishes. At first the miller had been very angry, had



grudged the money he had spent on his son's education, had called it wasted, and said Peter was ungrateful, unfilial, and a fool. Then he had ended by imploring him, with tears, to think seriously before blighting his hopes. Peter's mother had kept silence, that was more distressing than his father's passion. When they found him obdurate, though greatly troubled because of their disappointment, they begged him to come home for a year, think it over, and see, if by reflection, he could not come to a happier decision. He had consented to their wishes, on condition that he should not be idle, but have the post of schoolmaster, which the old pedagogue, who had held it for a lifetime, was now too old to fulfil any longer. This was easily arranged.

"You need not fear," he said breaking the silence, "I shall not drift and drift and at last get silted up in a stagnant pool of decaying promises. My time will come, and when it comes I shall be ready for it, and none the worse, I hope, for this interregnum."

"Heaven send it soon. I have no faith in your reflections. They may lead you anywhere. You're such a queer chap. Think of a man like you, looking forward, actually looking forward, to burying himself at the ends of the earth in the hey-day of his youth."

Peter laughed, a hopeful, manly laugh. He had no fears.

"You'll come and stay with me next summer, old fellow?" he said.

"Lord! do you expect to see me in that Hyperborean inaccessible, out-of-the-world vale of yours? Aren't the people savages, heathen, Goths? Didn't you once speak of a giantess, a sort of Polyphemus's mamma, that lived in a cave and herded sheep?"



“ Oh, Barbara Lynn ! Yes, I’ll introduce you to Barbara Lynn. But let me tell you, you’ll take off your hat to her as you would to a duchess.”

“ Look here, Fleming, don’t make a fool of yourself.”

“ I assure you I have no intention of doing so.”

“ Well, you know what I mean. When you get up there among your mountains, and are locked in by ice and snow, you’ll turn lonely. Nothing sucks the marrow out of a man’s bones like loneliness. So take care. Don’t marry a peasant lass.”

“ Most of my friends at home claim to be the sons and daughters of statesmen.”

“ Statesmen ! ”

“ Yes, statesmen. It’s the finest aristocracy in the world that lives in the little grey houses among the Westmorland fells. Most families can trace their pedigree back for more grandfathers than the greatest folk in the land. And they have coats of arms too, have them carved on their bread cupboards and meal kists—though you’ll not find them at the College of Heralds.”

The two men were quiet for a while ; the dawn grew and the irregular buildings came out in blurred masses against the sky. There was not a spire or pinnacle, whose shape Peter could not clearly trace. They were drawn, as it were, upon his flesh, nay, engraved upon his bones so that the wasting tissues of age should not be able to fret their outlines. He had been marked indelibly by the finger-print of Oxford. To him had been given the gift of an historical imagination. He lived in hourly touch with the learning, the tragedies, the visions of the past. Hall and cloister, chapel and narrow stair, echoed with its voices.

On a summer’s day his favourite haunt was the



high gallery round Saint Mary the Virgin's spire, where he could look over the city from its centre, and delight his eyes and his mind with vision and picture. Town and gown would seem to swirl below him in the narrow streets ; processions of monks and prelates would pass and repass ; Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer would come and go, and face the flames yonder by Balliol College. Archbishop Laud might pause opposite to his great porch, which he had crowned with a statue of the Virgin and Child ; the deformed figure of Alexander Pope might wander by from the tower of Stanton Harcourt, his mind stirring with the martial lines of Homer. Or Peter might see Matilda, when the snow lay thick on the ground, escaping from the castle, clad in white, while the armies of Stephen besieged it. Then he would look at the shady gardens, the great trees, the silver sheen of Cherwell or Isis, and remember that these had all been living in those far-off days, and were still living, and would continue to live, after he, and his generation had returned to dust.

From the wider view he would turn to the winged monkeys, the griffins, the pelicans of the roof below him, and he would hear again the chip, chip, of chisel and hammer in the thirteenth century, when the very stones he could lay his hands upon were first placed there.

Northward he would gaze with Saint Cuthbert, who stands in his niche, holding the head of King Oswald in his hand—and he would link his own wild Northern hills, where Barbara Lynn herded sheep, with this ancient city of civilization. Mayhap, as he thought of Barbara Lynn, his eyes would light upon Christ Church, and he would remember the saint whose



shrine it guards, to whom Oxford owes her birth—Saint Frideswide, blue-eyed and yellow-haired, who might have worn a crown.

Thought is linked to thought, North to South, man to man, in endless succession. Since Adam there has not been one break in the chain ; the whole of life is knitted up without a rent. Saint Frideswide and Barbara Lynn stretched their hands to each other through the dim years. Something of the same spirit lived in both, a spirit of self-mastery and aspiration though one refused a crown to keep herself unspotted from the world, the other, pure as any lily, should be crowned—so Timothy Hadwin had prophesied.

Peter did not despise the present because he lived so much in the past. He was no step-bairn of his glorious mother, but received a full inheritance from her hands. In the life about him he found inspiration and fellowship, without which he would have been shorn of his Samson locks. And he was a power among his fellow students. They might laugh at his childlike enthusiasms ; but they found him a tower of strength when strength was needed ; and under his outward sentimentality, they tapped a clear spring of common sense. He had a masculine love of independence ; he could work with mind and muscle strained to their utmost ; he could idle like an Oriental ; but he rose at dawn, slept on a truckle bed, ate plain fare like an ascetic. Of his lowly birth he made no secret. Patronage ran off him like water off a duck's back. He was curiously insensible to differences of rank or breeding. In mental ability he stood second to few. That which was said of William Pitt might be said equally well of him—"He never seemed to learn, but simply to recollect,"



Thus his academic years had passed ; now he stood without the closed door. His friends were going forth to careers of interest or influence ; he was drifting back to his Northern home to teach the village children how to make pot-hooks.

He had wrestled with himself for one bitter day, when the offer of a post, under the East India Company, had come from one, who had seen and understood his worth. A glorious prospect had opened out before him—golden hands had beckoned, the fair face of Fame had smiled. But he had turned away resolutely after one keen, longing glance, and forbade his eyes to stray after the vision again. Then his parents had begged him to come home, and though he could have found other spheres of work and influence congenial to him, he felt that the wishes of those who had given him birth, had struggled, denied themselves all, denied him nothing, had lived only for him, must be respected. Now he was not sorry, though at first he had been bitterly disappointed. He was fatalist enough to believe that no other course would bring him success, that the way would open out sooner or later ; and wise enough to know that a period spent alone in reflection might be made of infinite benefit.

The sun was rising. Over the slender minarets came a broad yellow beam that lighted up Saint Mary's spire, which soared into the blue air—a being of character and destiny, a maker and moulder of men, as well as a symbol of their deepest need.

Great buildings, like great minds, deepen and fix their personality with the passing years. The varied winds of life round their corners, refine their angles, and blend them into a harmonious whole. Great buildings, like great minds, endure a loneliness that is



awful in its magnitude. It is the price which must be paid by those who would rise above the fretting trivialities of existence. And this is their compensation—they uplift, they inspire others: they are an eternal assurance of the wonder and sacredness of human life.

There is nothing great in the world that has not this spirit of loneliness. Mountains, piercing the clouds, stars glittering overhead, purple seas, pyramids, palaces, cathedrals—no man knows them with the familiarity that can breed contempt. They may rouse hatred and fear, fire and sword have been turned against them; but fingers have rarely been snapped in their faces, or shoulders shrugged under their shadow.

The church of Saint Mary the Virgin, at Oxford, with the sun on its spire moved Peter profoundly. It had influenced him all his college days, it was influencing him still, It was sending him back to his home with two strong guardians for his soul—Faith and Duty—to help him in the monotonous way. It was giving him over—as it were—to the mountains to be taught by them.

That which the mountains have to give, they give freely to those who seek it. David and Mahommed, simple herders of sheep, were not ashamed to learn at their knees. Buddha and John the Baptist sought them in manhood and returned to be teachers of men, and to change the current of thought through all the world.

Peter did not know what his future would be. He believed that he would learn about it among his native hills.

As the light grew, the man who was only a voice withdrew from the shadow of the window curtains,



and went away. With an uncompromising sunbeam in the room to light up the supper dishes and soiled cloth, who could speak of those things, which for the most part, remain hidden in the heart ?

But he thought of Peter as he climbed up the narrow winding stair to his own room. He believed that his friend would succeed, yet he regretted, nearly as deeply as Peter, that it had not been possible for him to accept the post in India. He would have been a great man, he thought ; now he was likely to be simply a good man—a good man lacking distinction. Then he shrugged his shoulders with a laugh. The powers that be, no doubt, set the latter above the former in their book of human achievements.

Later in the day Peter left Oxford. As he turned his horse on the London road to look back upon the city, he looked with regret, it is true, regret because he was leaving the place where the happiest years of his life had been passed ; but he was full of hope for the future. If fritillaries hung in the Christ Church meadows, blue geraniums grew in Boar Dale ; if there were no spires and pinnacles at High Fold, there was the grey gable of the old mill-house, and the revolving wooden wheel. Though a great dome like the Radcliffe Camera did not rise out of Cringel Forest, Thundergay was more noble. He would not be lonely for there was Timothy Hadwin to sustain and inspire him.

He flicked his horse's reins and rode away. It was vain to stand and gaze. Deep in his heart was a thought to which he would not allow expression, but for some time he could not see distinctly or breathe with the ease of a man who is reviewing his past and looking forward to his future with an undivided mind.

## CHAPTER X

### KETEL'S PARLOUR

BARBARA sat on a stool in the mouth of the cave, reading aloud Pope's translation of the Iliad to Timothy Hadwin. The old man watched the girl narrowly, and felt his mind swing back through the ages to the days of Greek and Trojan.

Had Barbara lived then she would have been called the daughter of a god. Thetis of the Silver-foot ought to have been her mother, and some strong warrior king her father. She would have made a worthy sister to Achilles, a fit wife for Hector, tamer of horses. A wife ! a wife ! Timothy wondered. Would Barbara Lynn ever become the wife of some good, honest, plain man, and chain her mind to making and mending, the bearing of children, the ordinary toils of a married woman's life. He could not imagine her as such. She was in her fitting place as a herder of sheep upon the mountains, where sun and tempest were her familiar friends. Would she be happier if her lot brought her down from the clouds to the earth ? Would not the four grey walls of a cottage choke her ? He felt that in her nature was an intensity of feeling so great, that it was more likely to bring her sorrow than happiness.

The hour was noon of a summer's day. All around



the heat shimmered upon rock and grass ; the tarn lay white and motionless ; Thundergay was wrapped in a haze ; not a breath of air stirred the fern fronds.

Barbara's voice when she read had an exaltation, which it lacked in ordinary conversation. Her eyes, also, had lost their prevailing meditateness, and shone with an inner light. She thrilled to the depths of her soul with the lives of the people about whom she read. Her ears were alert to catch the voices still echoing down the centuries.

Timothy Hadwin had told her that nothing which happened had an end. No thought ever thought, no action ever committed could cease. Just as a pebble, dropped into the sea, caused waves to spread all about it, which rolled on and on in ever widening circles till they communicated their movements to the edges of the world, so the accumulated energy of the past was still surging around, beating upon human brains, and influencing the latest born of man, though its origin had been swallowed up and forgotten in the darkness of antiquity.

Barbara believed this. Through books she reached direct contact with the past. She was a vessel into which the magic old wine could be poured, and it warmed her, filled her serene mind with passions and sympathies, unknown to it at other times.

Often through the week Barbara went to Timothy Hadwin's cottage, or he came to Ketel's Parlour to hear her read, and to impart some of his knowledge to her hungry soul. The brief hour was a treasure snatched from the crowded commonplaces of the day, and was valued accordingly.

Just now, Barbara was reading about the ransoming of Hector's body. Her voice thrilled, and her eyes



grew luminous as she pictured the old king stealing across the plain by night with a wain filled with rich vestments, tripods, shining cauldrons, and a priceless bowl of gold to offer them in return for the dead body of his son. She could see the whole scene—the city of Troy with its battlements and towers vaguely outlined against the darkness, the dreadful plain of war, the long black boats of the Greeks, behind which sounded the ever-rolling sea. She saw Achilles' hut with its palisades, and pine bolt, that three strong men were wont to drive home at night, though Achilles could drive it home himself. And near by lay the body of Hector, face-downwards in the dust, as Achilles had left him after dragging him round the barrow of his dead friend at the dawn of day. Her eyes filled with tears for Hector, tamer of horses, Hector of the glancing helm, who strove against fate; but strove in vain, who was still beloved of Jove, and cared for in death by the god of the winged sandals, who closed his wounds, and kept his flesh from corruption.

But that which touched her most was Achilles' speech to the old king, when he came a suppliant to his hut in the night. The two urns standing by the throne of Jupiter, one full of curses, one full of blessings arrested her attention. Was it not true? Did the god not deal a mingled lot to most of his creatures, but gave them an enduring soul to bear it? The best and most beautiful things in the world were fraught with sorrow. The sunset often made her sad; equally sad sounded the singing of birds in spring; and love, the love of father, mother, husband, child, was saddest of all. This she had learnt among her friends of the dale.



She read on to the end of the book, where the mourners sat down to the sepulchral feast :

“ And peaceful slept the mighty Hector’s shade.”

Then she closed the volume and looked at Timothy.

“ Why do we sup it so eagerly ? ” she asked. “ It’s a poisoned cup to some, a bitter one to most, and sweet only to a few, a very few.”

The old man knew that she referred to life.

“ There was a preacher once,” he said, “ who thought it a burden too heavy to be borne. He believed in re-birth, countless re-births through generations, and the idea filled him with despair. His name was Gautama, but people called him Buddha, the Enlightened One, the Enlightener. He found a way of salvation and opened it to men.”

“ Was it a good way ? ”

“ Judge for thyself, Barbara. *The mind*,” he said, “ *approaching the eternal, has attained to the extinction of all desires ?* ”

She mused for a moment upon the words.

“ I don’t like them,” she replied, “ If I had no desires I shouldn’t be Barbara Lynn but a lump of clay.”

“ Then drink the cup. Buddha turned it upside down so that it could hold nothing. He emptied it of the sweetness as well as the bitterness. But thou, hold it up to be filled and drink.”

“ I shall have sorrow, Timothy ? ”

“ Yes, child.”

“ Pain and disappointment.”

“ It is the lot of those who would dig to find the riches of their own nature.”

“ The soil might be poor, and suffering turn up nought but dead ashes.”

“Tears fertilize it, Barbara.”

“Do you think that's the reason we have so much to bear? Should we be like weakly flowers, things that would wither up with the heat of the sun, or the cold winds o' winter, if suffering did not set us to deep trenching?”

All the vehemence had died out of her voice now. Speech had sunk to the meditative tones of every day life.

“Contentment leads to shallowness,” said the old man. “If you had been born in a great house instead of an upland farm, I doubt if you would have striven so hard to know and understand things that lie far out of your beaten track.”

“I've got a bitter envy towards those who have chances denied to me.”

“To some learning may be the goal; to you it may be the means to a higher goal.”

“What dost mean, Timothy?”

“You're a better scholar at self-discipline than at your books, my lass.”

Her face fell and she looked disappointed.

“Don't I do well? Will Peter think I have not improved?”

He patted her shoulder.

“You do very well indeed. I'm proud of you.”

Her brow flushed with pleasure and she rose, dwarfing and bedimming the little man with her large frame and golden head.

“To-morrow you'll come to me at the cottage,” he said.

She nodded, and they parted, he going down the dale, and she, leaping like a deer up the fellside, to the sheep pastures high upon Thundergay.



She paused on a rocky point and looked back. Below her lay Swirtle Tarn, and far, far off the shining waters of the great mere. She could see Greystones, no bigger than a pebble, lying under the cliffs, and the trees of Cringel Forest like a bundle of green wool fallen down between as plit in the hills. Troy, and the battle-field, and the long black boats had vanished ; but the land was mysterious with the epic of her own life.

She did not ask herself the reason for this emergence of her spirit into fuller existence. But she was aware of a veil which had been drawn over the arduous toils of the day, and the unveiling of beautiful things that made a new setting to her mind.

Peter Fleming was coming back. She often thought of Peter, and wondered what changes he would bring to the lonely life of the fells. But her imagination was nebulous ; it pictured nothing concrete ; she was content to let her mind hover round the sun-glistening vapour and leave the realisation for the unfolding of time.

Surprise, which gave rise to many wild rumours in the dale, had greeted the announcement that Peter Fleming was going to keep school. No one could think of an adequate reason for such a descent from the pinnacle of learning where he stood. Anyone could keep school, but few had the opportunity or ability to become a bishop. Dusty John said little, but Peter's mother lost her disappointment at the turn of affairs in having the schoolroom cleaned for her son, in seeing the moss scraped from the door-step, and in herself hanging curtains in all the windows. Peter would live at home, and sleep in his attic under the mill-house roof, but the school-parlour was to be



his study. There he could have silence, his books, and grow wise.

The village school of High Fold was a little stone building standing just within the fringe of Cringel Forest. The road ran by it, and the trees crowded so closely around, that they seemed to jostle each other in their eagerness to peer through the doors and windows. A kitchen, bed-chamber and parlour, and a long room fitted with desks and benches made up the interior, the walls of which were plastered and whitewashed, and patterned by the ever-moving shadows of the encroaching trees. There the rustle of leaves was never silent. A cobbled path led from road to threshold. Just now, in the late summer, it was bordered on either side by a rank growth of hemlock.

Barbara had passed by it several times lately, and looked at it with speculative interest. She thought of a house as the shell of the mind that inhabited it. Greystones was the cipher of her great-grandmother's personality. The old woman had made it what it was, had given it an atmosphere of a wild, yet living, past. What would Peter make of the little green-bowered cot in Cringel Forest? She pondered upon Peter all through the day, which sped with winged feet.

In the evening Barbara went home. Swirtle Tarn smoked like a cauldron of boiling water as she threaded its lonely shore. The vapour swirled up in spiral form, and when it reached the light of the moon, appeared most strange and beautiful, like columns of white marble rising from a floor of polished blue stone. It was late, and Lucy must have gone to bed some time ago; yet she would linger for a while to enjoy the beauty of the night.



The air was very still ; even the waterfalls were subdued ; the birds were silent ; the flocks were asleep ; everything looked unsubstantial.

Barbara thought that she had never before felt quite the same sense of mystery in the night. Surely that which she looked upon was not the material form of the earth, but its spiritual body ! Were not those white vapours its thoughts going up to the Eternal Being who gave them ? All thoughts had the same origin. The universe was full of them, but only into the receptive mind could they come. There they worked magic, were humanized themselves, while they spiritualized the human being in whose brain they lodged. And having suffered this metamorphosis, they flowed back again, as the glistening vapours flowed back to their source.

Thus man and his Creator come into touch with each other. The Creator gives the thought, the creature returns it with its own interpretation thereof. So man is made spiritual, and God human.

Such ideas as these were the outcome of Barbara's conversations with Timothy. But she did not accept his many strange statements without question. She pondered them for days, coloured them with her own imagination, absorbed them at length into her own personality. This gave her beliefs the force of experience.

Barbara went home.

Lucy had gone to bed but she was not asleep. Nevertheless, she shut her eyes, and made no movement when her sister entered their room. She knew that Barbara was bending over her, that Barbara's face was full of compassion for her sorrow. But she was too weary with weeping to long for anything save



silence, and a corner where she could indulge her tears unseen.

Barbara dreamed that night of the mingled cup, which Jove gave the children of men to drink. She tasted it herself, and Lucy drank it to the dregs. Peter, laughing as was his wont, took it from Jove's hand, and she saw his eyes grow wild, his hair white, his cheeks haggard like a ghost. Then the vapours of the tarn rose around, swirling, twirling up to the light of the moon, blotting out their faces. After this dream the night was a blank until the day dawned.

"Do you know when Peter will be back?" asked Barbara, as she milked the kye in the grey of early morning.

"Nay," replied Lucy: then she added passionately, "if I had a chance of leaving the dale I'd never come back to it, never again. I'd put the memory away like a bad dream. It's an ill place. It's under a ban. Peter's silly to set foot in it when the world is free for him to walk in."

"I'm glad Peter is coming home," said Barbara.

Lucy made no reply. So far she had not given much heed to Peter's return. Now the thought sent a touch of colour to her face.

Since Joel went away life had dragged for her. Drudgery had become her lot, unlightened by any pleasant experience, or made bearable by hope. She ate her bread with tears. She was glad when each day dawned, and thankful when each day died. She longed for change, any change that would break the monotony of her existence. She was weary of living, although so young. Yet she did not desire death. All that she wanted was to fall asleep, and waken up with the thread of her old life cut, and the possibility



of a new life before her. To go on and on, year after year, always following the same humdrum path was a contingency, which she could not contemplate without despair. She had striven to put Joel's image out of her mind. He had written once, but his letter was superficial, and she believed that he had ceased to care for her. Regret that the past was past drove her to spend many a night in weeping. If she could, willingly she would have forgotten him ; but she was unable to forget.

Some days later as Lucy was walking through Cringel Forest she saw Peter sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree near the school-house. He did not hear her approach, and she had been watching him with gradually brightening eyes for a few moments before he felt their influence. Then he rose with a laugh ; but it was not as spontaneous and merry as it used to be.

"You're welcome back, Peter," said Lucy. "The dale is very dull without you."

"Is that so ?" he replied, taking her hand, and looking affectionately into her face.

"Even great-granny smiled when she heard you were back. 'Tell him to come to Greystones,' she said, 'and bring his dancing bear with him. I want waking up.'"

"Well," he answered, with a faint note of sarcasm in his voice, "it's some compensation for giving up your heart's desire to fill the role of merry-andrew with satisfaction."

"Didn't you want to come back, Peter ?"

"I was just thinking when I saw you, how duty, and affection and inclination get mixed up and twisted into a knot in a man's soul."

“ In a woman's too,” she replied.

He looked at her. There was a pensiveness in her face that attracted him. It had lost the inconsequence of childhood, and taken on the maturity of the woman. She was less vivacious, but there was a sympathetic glow in her sweet eyes. He saw all this at a glance ; she was not like Barbara, who hid her feelings under a placid brow. Lucy lived and suffered in the eyes of the world. Peter had heard rumours of an attachment between her and Joel Hart, but as Joel had neither substance, nor—to a man's eyes—much character, he had paid little heed to them in the past. Now he wondered if Joel had treated her badly. Poor Lucy ! she was far too good for him.

He walked with her through the forest.

“ You know I'm going to keep school ? ” he said.

“ Aye. The children are delighted. They think you will feed them on lollipops and give them no lessons to do. They call you Peter Piper, you know.”

“ Peter Piper is it ! Soon it will be Peppery Peter. I'll go out to-morrow morning and cut birch-rods to put in pickle.”

Lucy thought that in spite of his laugh he was sad. Her own sorrow had opened up her nature so that she could understand others in a way she had never been able to do before. Peter felt her sympathy. Though she said little, the knowledge of it was conveyed to him by those unspoken words, which are uttered and heard by the heart alone. He told her about the post in India which had been such a temptation to him ; about his parents' disappointment because he would not enter the Church ; and how he had consented to their wishes to come home for a time, so as to give the matter a longer consideration.



“ I wish I could do what they want,” he said, “ especially as my dear old father is failing. Don’t you think he’s failing, Lucy ? He is so much quieter and slower than he used to be ! ”

“ Oh, your coming will cheer him up.”

“ You have great faith in that side of my nature.”

“ It’s true, Peter, you’ve cheered me up a lot in the last half hour.”

“ By telling you my troubles ? ”

“ I’m sorry,” she said kindly. “ I can understand, oh, believe me, I can understand how you felt when you gave up the thought of going to India. I’ve learnt a lot lately ; I’ve had to give up things myself. Life isn’t all roses at Greystones, you know ! ”

He looked down at her.

“ We’ve both lost some of the sparkle out of our eyes, Lucy,” he said. “ It’s the price men and women have to pay for the possession of their own souls.”

## CHAPTER XI

### THE BACK END

LUCY sat on the bridge that spanned the beck just above the farm. The water had diminished to a thin stream, trickling between the stones ; the pools were nearly empty ; the moss on the rocks was yellow instead of green. All things looked parched ; even the marshes were dry. The summer had been as nearly rainless as a summer can be among the dales and fells.

Lucy's eyes were fixed upon the low grey house before her. The weeds, which grew between its rough slates, were dead ; the feathery grasses, that found congenial crannies in the walls, drooped ; the garden—a narrow patch between the door and the beck—was already seared by the hand of autumn.

But that which Lucy's eyes beheld was not the Greystones of to-day, gilded by the westering sun, but the Greystones of the days to come, swept by the rain, beaten by winds, or wreathed round and round by the whirling white sheets of a snow-storm.

In a few weeks' time winter would be here ; long, wild nights would follow short, wild days ; the sun would be blotted out, or rise above the mountain rampart for a few hours, roll across the dale like a red wheel, and plunge down behind another mountain rampart amid lurid mists, or smoky clouds.



Her mind dwelt upon this picture with dread. She told herself that she could not pass another winter at Greystones, cooped up with the fearsome old woman, her great-grandmother. She would lose her wits if she did, or die ; at any rate, lose her youth. Youth was not so much a matter of a few years as of happiness—the happy were always young, the sad old long before their time.

As Lucy sat on the bridge this fair autumn evening, herself as fair as a little rosy cloud floating overhead, although she was outwardly calm and unoccupied, she was listening, not with the best of grace, to two voices talking in her own soul. One had been trying to make itself heard for days, nay, weeks ; but she would pay no heed to it. Now it refused to be stifled any longer.

“ You are doing wrong,” said this better self, but the other part of her vehemently protested innocence.

Ever since Peter Fleming had returned to High Fold Lucy’s attitude towards life had changed. She had not been happier, but she had been less willing to suffer with resignation. She had looked facts in the face. She considered Joel’s departure and the possibility of his ever returning ; would she not be grey-haired by then ? Fortunes were not made in a day. She weighed her own chances of escape from a life that she detested. There was only one. So she made up her mind that sorrow should not fall upon her like a blighting sickness, take the roses out of her cheeks, the light from her eyes, the hope from her heart. She refused to be thrust into darkness. If happiness was not bestowed upon her as a gift, she would go out and seek it.



Yet she was ill at ease—beset by fears, troubled by conscience.

She rose from her seat upon the bridge and looked down the dale to Forest Hall. Her eyes had lost their sweetness and were hard, her lips were compressed.

She was passionately wishing that Joel had not gone away, but stayed at home and made the best of his luck. But as he had gone, why had he not been kinder? The summer was nearly over, winter was at hand, and he had only written once—a letter so cold that it might have been read from the housetops, and even the rooks flying home would have got as much satisfaction out of it as she. A loving word from him would have brought summer back to her. She would have made shift to put up with her present existence. She would have waited till fortune had smiled upon him. If it had kept a sullen face, she would have given him cheer and hope. But he had forgotten her. She told herself this again and again making a reason out of it for her own actions. She would forget, too, and find someone else to spend her affection upon.

She had determined one thing—she would remain no longer than she must at Greystones. She hated it. She hated the loneliness, the crags that overhung the house, the snow, and the winds, and the rain. She hated her great-grandmother. So hardened had she become by that which she had suffered that she was not afraid to express her real feelings to herself. She would cease to fetch and carry for the old woman, she would refuse to be a drudge. She would be happy before she was too old to enjoy happiness.

She turned away from gazing down the dale as though she had fixed her determination, but her better



self would not let her be. It insisted that happiness was a state of the soul and she could not win it until hers was at rest.

“I am doing no wrong,” she argued, “nothing that hundreds of women do not do. I am lonely, I seek companionship. I am sad, I seek happiness. I want sympathy, so I give it.”

But, in spite of her protestations, her endeavour to throw a cloak over the real meaning of her actions, she was conscious of a certain lowering of her ideals. She was no longer the innocent girl she had been a few months ago.

“You are playing a game to win a man’s heart,” said her better self. “You are wiling him by arts and ways that only a woman can use. You know that men are attracted, like children, by that which is beautiful and looks good, so you lay yourself out to please his eyes, and win his love.”

Lucy moved restlessly from one side of the bridge to the other, as though by such means she could get away from the troublesome voice.

Was it true? she asked herself. Was she acting a part? She liked Peter very much; she felt safe with him; she meant to marry him if it lay in her power to do so; but did she love him? Was she not still in love with Joel? In spite of all that had happened his features and form were constantly in her mind’s eye. He influenced her still; she could not shake off the fascination that he had exerted over her from the beginning of their courtship. Lucy rose. The communion of herself with herself had brought her no satisfaction.

Listlessly she wandered down the dale. She wanted to do that which was right, but many conflicting



emotions swayed her. Hurt affection, fear of the future, wish for change, out-weighed other and better desires. She strolled on. The sun had set, but a mellow light filled the aisles of Cringel Forest. Without conscious direction her feet took her to the dell, where Joel and she had spent many a twilight hour. She peered in, standing on the banks above. How cool and green it looked! The holly screen was coralled with berries, the mosses were luxuriant, the pool gleamed like a dark jewel. Then the past rushed back upon her—the months of separation shrivelled up; it seemed to be but yesterday that she had met Joel there.

Life came to a standstill. She did not cry out, or fling herself upon the ground, or flee from the haunted spot. She remained peering through the bushes, her eyes set wide, and her lids rigid. She was seeing a vision of Joel Hart in her mind's eye. The place was full of him. The pool had many a time reflected his features, he used to sit upon that stone, lean against yonder tree. The harebells were in bloom when he and she were last here—still two or three frail flowers hung fading upon their stems.

A footstep started her. So vivid was her impression of his presence, that she half expected to hear him call, or see him rise up out of the shadows. The blood surged through her veins, her heart beat loudly, her breath came hurriedly.

But it was only Peter Fleming that burst through the haunted silence—plain-featured Peter Fleming and his big brown bear. She drew further among the bushes, not wishing to be seen. The beast lumbered down to the pool, splashed about in it, greatly to the delight of its master; and, having churned up the



mud, robbed the place of its magic, and exorcised the vision, man and brute went away.

Lucy returned to Greystones as troubled as she had left it.

The first few weeks after Peter's return home had been spent by him in schooling his heart to accept his present life cheerfully. He never showed a desponding frame of mind to any one but Lucy, and only to her, because she had—as it were—enticed him into unusual confidences by her fair face and gentle sympathy. But his was not a nature to whine over that which it could not have, and before long he got back—outwardly, at any rate—his jovial temper. The villagers found him the same gay fellow, ready to wrestle with them on the green when the day's work was done; the lads and lasses teased him about his lap dog, Big Ben, the bear; the children were more certain than ever that lollipops would be their daily fare, when school began after the harvest was over.

Peter passed a few days cutting down the trees round the school-cottage. He made a clearing where the sun could look through, and he dug a flower-bed under the window. Soon after day-break each morning, he left the mill, swung up the village street past the church and entered the forest. He spent many hours there, his eyes and ears alert to all the wondrous life going on in the sweet green shade. Hares and rabbits, water-rats and weasels scurried away before his approaching footsteps, then stopped to look at him from a fern, or a tree-trunk, or a moss-grown stone. Squirrels leaped among the boughs overhead, and threw empty nuts down, and birds, less shy, and more mercenary, scavenged in the drifts of last year's



leaves, not heeding him at all. Often he passed many hours with Timothy Hadwin, discoursing of things, that lie at the roots of human development. He laughingly said that he was always ready for an excuse to fling himself upon the warm, sweet-smelling earth, and look at the sky, which hung over the tree-tops like a blue china cup. But he was not idle. He read books of Theology and books on Philosophy in the little white-washed parlour of the school-house. He read sincerely, even with ardour, but ever came to the same conclusion that the priesthood was not his vocation.

Made restless and impatient by unavailing study, he at length flung his books aside, turned to the free breezy life of the fells, and went fishing. Swirtle Tarn, and all the mountain streams, saw his grey clad figure through the dusks of early morning and night. Neither rain nor heat could keep him at home. He was out from sunrise to sunset, his skin burnt brown as an Autumn leaf, and his hair bleached to the colour of wind-blown bent.

Sometimes he saw Barbara, her figure outlined against the sky ; or he spied her climbing like a goat up the gaunt face of Thundergay ; or he caught the light glancing from her reaping hook as she cut bracken for the cows' winter bedding ; and once, when the sun was level with the hills, a giant shadow of horse and woman fell upon him, and she passed close by, leading home the peats.

Peter did not often have speech with Barbara. He did not seek her, for his mind was preoccupied with his own concerns, and she did not cross his path. He saw Lucy much oftener, but he was too open and honest to imagine that their frequent meetings were



planned by the brain that lay behind such blue and innocent eyes.

Thus the summer died upon the hills.

Harvesting, stacking turf, and bringing sheep from the highest pastures made the "back end" busy for the fell folk. A spirit of good fellowship inspired them, and they helped each other, gathering first at this farm, then at that, toiling through the heat of the day and feasting at night; dancing the harvest moon up into the sky, or out of it—as the case might be. No lack of willing workers came to Greystones, and Mistress Lynn indulged her pent-up generosity on this occasion, providing liberal ale, bread, and cheese for her guests.

On the night of the kern supper, the harvesters brought home the kern baby in triumph to Greystones. The kern baby was made of the last cut of corn, platted into some semblance of the human figure, its head stuffed with a red apple. They hung it up on the kitchen wall, near the four-poster, where it would remain until the end of the year, when the best cow would get the corn and Jan Straw the apple.

For half a century the kern apple had been Jan's meed on Christmas morning. He took it to the kirk-garth, and laid it on the grave of "her o' the white fingers." During the night some wild creature came out of the forest and ate it up, but he never knew, for the churchyard was too holy a place to be disturbed by many pilgrimages. He had an idea that the apples were all garnered up somewhere, watched over by an angel, and that he would find them again, hereafter, in a golden heap.

The weather continued summerlike; the bracken grew taller and taller in the moister places of the dale until it stood as high as Lucy's shoulder.



We'll have to pay for this by and by," said Mistress Lynn.

One morning a cloud hung over Thundergay. The next day the sky was overcast, the air oppressive, and faint thunder rolled, like the booming of great waves on a distant shore.

"Didst ever have weather like this before?" asked Barbara.

"Aye, long ago." The old woman laid down her knitting needles and told the story of that time, with the awe of one who had heard the flocks calling upon the hills night and day for water—a sound which lingers in human ears for ever.

"The ground cracked like an overbaked pot," she said. "The becks ran dry and Swirtle Tarn shrank till it was little better than a farm-yard puddle."

Barbara went out. She took the cattle track to the cave where she and the hind gathered the sheep from Thundergay. All through the hot oppressive hours they toiled, and by the afternoon the flocks were huddled upon the slopes above Swirtle Tarn, watching with frightened eyes the flashes of light, that lit up the gathering darkness. Then the hind left her to drive in the cattle.

Barbara was the only human being in that gloomy place. And she was the only living thing that was not afraid. The moor fowl called restlessly to each other, flew hither and thither, or hid themselves among the ling. A hare, crossing a strip of fern-clad slope, raised its head to sniff suspiciously, when it shot away, swift as an arrow.

At Greystones Lucy sat by the open door spinning. She dreaded a thunderstorm as something supernatural. She would rather have been with Barbara



at Ketel's Parlour, than alone, here, with the old woman.

She lifted her eyes again and again to look at the mountain round which the blackest clouds were gathered. It seemed to draw nearer, until it stood like a black blot just beyond the barn. Then she got up and shut the door.

Mistress Lynn watched the girl with keen eyes. She had noticed that Lucy's face of late had regained its colour. But there was a hard expression upon it, and her speech came slower and less gaily than of old. The old woman knew the meaning of it. She could see into Lucy's mind almost as easily as if it were laid open for her inspection.

The daylight struggled and died ; a grey unearthly gloom came on all things, a stillness as of death.

"Are you frightened, Lucy?" asked Mistress Lynn.

"Maybe it's the last day," replied the girl.

The old woman's face was ghastly as the face of a corpse in the strange light which filtered through the windows. The kitchen seemed to be swallowed up by a weird sepulchral vapour.

She laughed.

"Get down on thy knees, Lucy Lynn," she said ironically, "get to thy knees and pray for a sinful old woman and an innocent lass. Don't forget Peter Fleming forbye. I misgive me he'll come in for a wetting if he doesn't tie wings to his heels. He went up the fells a few hours ago."

"Peter! when? I didn't see him."

"Why shouldsta? He came to see me, and you were in the dairy."

Lucy seized the poker to stir the peats; it was

heavy bar of iron and clanged like a bell when she knocked it in her nervousness and irritation against the stone jambs of the fireplace. Then she jumped up and looked in at the cow-house, where the hind was just stalling the cattle. There she saw Jan Straw, sitting with his hands on his knees, staring into vacancy. He did not seem to see her, but he laughed like a mindless creature at every rumble of distant thunder.

“It’s going to be a fearful storm, Tom,” she said to the hind.

“A regular smasher !” he replied.

“You didn’t see anyone coming down the fellside, did you, when you were gathering the kye ?”

“Nay, never a soul. Every man o’ sense has got his flocks into shelter by now.”

Lucy returned to the kitchen.

“Jan Straw’s by with himself,” she said.

Her great-grandmother continued to knit composedly.

“Look up the dale, and see if you can spy Peter,” she said with a wicked gleam in her eyes.

“He’s old enough to look after himself,” replied the girl tartly.

“Then look up the dale and see if the storm has broken on Thundergay. I’m wondering about Barbara.”

Lucy did as she was bid. The sky was shrouded by a heavy pall, through which the sun still shone as through smoked glass. But the mountain had disappeared. Now and then it flashed into sight as the lightning played round it, then darkness swallowed it up.

Meanwhile Barbara was standing at the mouth of



the cave. She looked a very solitary being in the midst of that tremendous gathering of the tempest. The forces which nature had wakened were so overpowering and mysterious, they could have swept her away, if she had exposed herself to them, like a withered leaf. Everything around her was magnified by the lightning—the cliffs were towers, the bushes distorted creatures, the rocks—fragments from the heights above, which former storms had thrown about like pebbles—loomed in the darkness as big as elephants or those prehistoric beasts, the mammoths that Timothy Hadwin had told her about. Behind her the mouth of the cave yawned like a black mouth waiting to swallow her up. The dogs crept close to her side, the sheep, too, seemed to be reassured by her presence. Could they have spoken they might have uttered the words said by the Red-skins to Montcalm:

*“It is when we look into your eyes that we see the greatness of the pinetree and the fire of the eagle.”*

The lightning played off its fire-works against the inky clouds; the thunder crashed like the wheels of a great car hurtling down Thundergay. The dales and ravines rolled and reverberated. Every pinnacle spat fire, every cliff gave back the sound in twofold, threefold, even sevenfold echoes.

Still Barbara stood at the mouth of the cave and watched. She had not seen a storm like this before—though thunderstorms were common occurrences among the fells. She thought it was like the convulsion which must have attended the making of the earth. She could imagine that a god was moving within the cloud, striking upon his anvil with a great hammer, and forging bands for a new world.

The lightning and thunder ceased. The quietness

was more oppressive than the noise had been. A waterfall rang startlingly clear like a call. The darkness increased with the silence. All the nearer objects sank into a thick atmosphere.

Then came the rain. It did not fall in drops, but in a flood. It drummed upon the grass and rocks ; it sounded like an army coming down the mountain side and passing along the dale. Every well-head, that had been dry for weeks, broke into clamouring ; Thundergay gushed with fountains ; the fountains gathered ; they rushed along like mad horses.



## CHAPTER XII

### SIX WHITE HORSES AND A COACH

THE cow-house was dim, like night, when a cloudy moon is shining, although the clock had just struck four. Through a small window the grey light stole and vaguely lit up the horned heads of the cattle. It showed Jan Straw sitting in a corner.

Rain beat on the roof like the trampling of heavy feet ; it fell in a sheet from the eaves, and spouted like a waterfall from the drip-stone ; the noise of the beck increased until it became a roar.

With a heave and a snort Cushy, Barbara's favourite cow, got up. She feared ! she did not know what she feared ; but perhaps in those days when the earth was new-made and cataclysms were frequent occurrences, her forbears had learnt to dread the sounds of a rising flood. She stirred the other beasts into restlessness, although they had borne the thunder and lightning with timid resignation.

Jan Straw sat motionless. He had stopped muttering, and his eyes were half-closed. His hands were cold as ice. The flame of life was burning very low. To him had come a presentiment that death was on his way to put it out. Once he had seen a play acted upon the village green in which Death came by with all his bones a-jangling, and the memory of it had not

faded. His intellect was too beclouded to fear. The dogged stolidity, that had made him an unrepining drudge through manhood to old age, now made him a placid watcher for the fleshless form that would extinguish his little candle.

Lucy heard the trampling and snorting of the beasts, and she came to the cow-house door. Peter Fleming was with her, for he had reached Greystones just in time to take shelter there. The sudden change from the brightly lit kitchen, where the candles were burning, to the dimness of this place at first bewildered him; he could not distinguish anything clearly—the cattle looked like ungainly shadows, and their horns like the bare and twisted branches of trees. Then one by one the forms took shape, and his eyes fell upon the old man.

“Hulloa,” he cried, laying his hand on Jan’s bent shoulder, “What ho, Jan! how goes thyself? Why! I believe you’ve been asleep in the midst of all this racket. It’s loud enough to waken the dead.”

The old man roused himself from his lethargy, gathered his scattered wits, and looked at the countenance bending over him for some moments without replying.

At last he asked in a voice that trembled away into silence :

“Will it waken her?”

Peter knew of whom he was thinking.

“Nay,” he said kindly, “her bed is a bed of peace.”

The grey face fell, and the young man saw that he had not anticipated Jan’s desire.

“I shouldn’t wonder,” he replied, “if she doesn’t hear it in her sleep, and dream of you.”



"I thought as how she might waken and be watching," answered Jan.

"M'appen she is," Lucy spoke with tenderness, for she was fond of the old man. "She'll certainly be looking out for thee, Jan. She'll never sleep so heavily but she'll hear thy step when thee goes."

"I's going soon."

His head sunk upon his breast ; he was old, forlorn and weary.

"Nay, Jan, nay," said Lucy, "you mustn't leave us yet. Barbara and me. We'd be so lonesome sitting by the winter fire, wanting thy face that's smiled on us ever since we were born."

"We's o' comers and gangers," he replied. "There's new faces coming to take the place of the old ones. I's ganging. He'll soon pass by."

"Who, Jan ?"

"Him with the reaping-hook."

Lucy laughed his words away, though she shivered.

"It's a coach and six white horses that'll come for thee, Jan. Thee shall ride on velvet cushions, the horses will be shod with gold, and the bits will be made of silver."

"Aye, that's the manner of it," said Peter cheerfully.

"Six white horses and a coach," repeated the old man, then he shook his head. "Coaches is for gentry folk. I'll have to go away with him, the man of the bare bones. He's like me the way he gets his bread, reaping the harvest from the fields, and no' finding mickle fatness in it nouth."

"Come to the fire," said Peter. "You're cold here, come and get warm."

He helped Jan to his feet, and supported the



tottering footsteps to the kitchen, where the old man sank into his seat in the ingle-cheek.

The rain was still clattering overhead, and sweeping down the windows in a solid sheet of water, so that nothing could be seen through the glass. Peter went to the door, and looked out.

“By Jove!” he exclaimed, “the beck has wakened up with a vengeance.”

“It won’t sweep away the house, will it?” asked Lucy. She felt much relieved to have Peter by her side, and even dared to cast her eyes upon the angry stream, swirling under the garden wall.

Her great-grandmother laughed.

“Lucy’s a timid lass,” she said. “Before you came she thought it was the last day, but I knew the good God was a better landlord than that, and would want more market out o’ his green fields than he’s gotten so far, before he burnt them into ashes. Now she’s afraid Greystones will fall! Hoots-toots, bairn. Greystones will stand as long as there’s a Lynn to care for it. I’ve seen many a worser storm than this.”

The old woman talked on. When her mind got back to bygone days she was garrulous. Some of her stories offended the fastidious tastes of Lucy, but Peter liked them. Strange customs and coarser habits did not blind him to the fact that life and its passions are much the same in every age, only wearing a different garb.

Lucy and Peter still stood, one at each side of the doorway, looking out. The beck raced below them, spluttering and foaming, and they could hear the grinding of rocks under its feet. It rose rapidly higher. Even as they watched it snatched at a bush on the opposite bank, twisted it as a child might



twist a blade of grass, rooted it up, and swept it away.

“Barbara will get wet!” said Lucy. “She’s at Ketel’s Parlour. There’s a crack in the roof, and the rain sometimes gets in.”

Peter cast a glance at the still teeming clouds. He had not seen Barbara for a long time, and he was half inclined to venture forth, make his way up the dale, through a hundred spouting waterfalls, and share her lonely vigil.

Lucy divined his thoughts. She shut the door hastily and drew him to a seat.

“We’ll have tea; you’d like tea, Peter? and great-granny is dying for a cup,” she said. Then she whispered so that the old woman could not hear: “I’m so thankful you came—I really was frightened.”

Peter allowed himself to be ruled by her, making only a laughing protest. The prospect outside was not enticing, and the prospect within was comfortable and bright.

Lucy stepped lightly about her duties, spreading the table with clap-cakes, butter and honey. Peter’s presence excited her; her eyes sparkled; her movements were lively. She dulled her ears to the roar of the torrent, and the rushing of the rain—though both were deafening.

Jan Straw awakened from the sleep into which the kindly warmth of the kitchen had thrown him, and followed her with a steady gaze. He thought that she was a being between an angel and a fairy. Her eyes were blue like flowers with the morning dew in them, her skin was soft and white as the breast feathers of a swan, her cheeks were like roses. He had a confused remembrance of a story, still told in the dale,



about the man who had seen the last of the fairies. He had disturbed them at their play, and they had run up a ladder into a cloud, shutting a door after them. No one ever saw them again among the tarns and meres, dancing by moonlight. "Her o' the white fingers" had, also, gone up into a cloud, and been seen no more. But she was an angel. Looking at Lucy he forgot the man with the reaping hook.

Lucy masked the tea, and called Jan to the table. They tried to forget that awesome sound of rushing water outside. Mistress Lynn could be a jovial companion when she chose, and she liked to cross wits with Peter. He dared to contradict her—such a rare experience she appreciated, for it was done good-humouredly. The old woman had a purpose in unbending to him. She wanted him to marry Lucy.

She wanted it for several reasons—because she liked him and knew he was no fortune-hunter, because she wished to see Lucy settled before Joel came back—she had other plans for Joel—because she was sorry for the girl's disappointment: she knew what blighted hopes felt like when the heart was young. Though she would not have scrupled to add disappointment to disappointment had it suited her purpose, in this case she was at one with her great-grand-daughter, and determined to bring about that which they both desired.

When tea was finished Peter bent over Lucy's chair to read her cup.

"Health and wealth and happiness," he said.

"I've heard it many times," said she, with a light laugh. "I've got the first, and dreamed of the last, but I've still to catch a glint of the other. Read



Jan's," she handed him the old man's mug. "Perhaps you'll find something worth having there."

"Nowt but the rheumatics has ever come out o' my cup," said Jan gravely.

"But I see six white horses and a coach," replied Peter.

"Do 'ee now?" Jan put his finger into the empty mug and sorted the tea-leaves one by one, counting them aloud. "So there be," he said.

Lucy began to wash up the dishes, childishly pleased to bare her round, white arms, when there was someone to see them.

Throughout the meal, which had been a merry one, they had tacitly ignored the rain, although it was still coming down—as they say in the dales—whole watter. Now they were suddenly silent. But on the slates it clattered, on the walls it slashed, on the ground it spluttered, through the air it fell hissing. Over and above it the beck thundered.

Mistress Lynn sat upright in her bed, and listened with an expression of awe upon her grim old countenance; Lucy drew nearer to Peter, her eyes wide and panic-stricken; Jan Straw left the ingle.

"Hark!" said the old woman.

Peter went to the door and looked out.

Down the bed of the stream came a foaming, boiling cataract. Seen through the gloom it was suggestive of flying, riderless horses, tossing their manes in the air, and chafing at their bits.

"Six white horses and a coach," muttered Jan, stumbling bare-headed into the rain.

"Come back," cried Lucy.

"Come back," cried Peter.

"Jan, Jan, you old fool," said Mistress Lynn,



leaning out from her great bed, and peering across the candle-lit room to the darkness framed by the open door.

But Jan was gone. The garden wall fell and the water rolled up to the doorstep, where it seemed to pause before slowly withdrawing. It did not go back alone. Lucy, regardless of her own safety, impulsive to recklessness where her affections were concerned, followed it, and thinking that she saw Jan but a few steps ahead, ran forward.

The ground gave way under her feet, and the beck had its grip on her in a moment.

The incident happened so swiftly that Peter was already struggling with the flood for the possession of the girl before he realised what had taken place. When he tried to recall it afterwards he could remember nothing save that his hand, by its own sense and cunning, had snatched at her frock as she was being swept past him. He dragged her from the water, and carried her into the house, laying her drenched form down before the fire. She was not unconscious, and stumbled to her feet, crying :

“ Jan, save Jan, Peter ! ”

She would have followed him out again into the slashing rain, but Mistress Lynn called her back peremptorily.

The old woman was terribly upset. She had had to lie in the four-poster and know that something dreadful was taking place outside. She had watched Jan rush out, then Lucy, then Peter ; but she had heard nothing save the roar of waters, and seen nothing save a faint white gleam as they foamed by. Now she strove for composure, and wiped the tears that had come unbidden upon her cheeks.



“Go and fettle thyself,” she said to the shivering girl. “Then you’ll be fit to look after the old man if he needs looking after any more.”

Peter raced the beck through the copse where it was ploughing among the tree-trunks; he sought along the basin by the falls, but he could not find a trace of Jan Straw. He shouted, but he could not hear his own voice among the roaring of the waters, much less a cry for help were it uttered. He followed the flood through Cringel Forest to the village, where he told what had happened. Then, knowing that there was no chance now of finding the old man alive, if there had ever been a chance, he retraced his steps to Greystones.

He found Lucy kneeling before the fire drying her hair. A sob broke from her when he returned alone for she had hoped against hope.

“You couldn’t find him?” she said.

He shook his head sorrowfully.

“Poor old Jan is gone,” he replied.

Lucy covered her face with her hands, but the old woman leaned back upon her pillows, a red patch on each cheek.

“Gone!” she said, “gone! Jan Straw gone! The last link with my ain generation.” She was silent, seeing the years which he had kept alive for her, fading away. “So Jan’s gone, the old, old, creature, but younger than me by twenty winters. Poor Jan.”

Then she turned upon Lucy. She must find some vent for the choking emotion of age.

“This o’ comes of your fairy-tales,” she said. “Six white horses and a coach! You’d better have left him sitting in the cow-house, waiting for the man with the reaping-hook.”

“Don’t blame me,” cried the girl. “I would have saved him if I could.”

“You’d have drowneded yourself to no purpose. What could a lass like you do when the beck’s in spate? It would have twisted you up like a windle-straw.”

Lucy turned to Peter with entreaty in her eyes.

He took her hand and stroked it.

“I think you were very brave,” he said.

He saw again the water with its tigerish lips, the crunching rocks, the broken body of a sheep tossing among the foam; he looked at the girl, at her tearful eyes, her damp hair hanging in jetty rings round her face; she seemed to be but a child, a forlorn, unhappy child, seeking for sympathy.

Hardly realizing what he did he bent down and kissed her.

“Old Jan was glad to go, Lucy,” he said. “You must remember that, and not grieve for him. He had a long life and a lonely one. But he is now walking beside still waters with her o’ the white hands.”

Night came, the rain ceased, and the moon reaped the stars with a golden sickle. The sky was calm, but the fells and dales were still roaring with the sound of many waters, and streaking the darkness with silver threads. Peter went home, stirred to the depths of his being.

The next afternoon, when the beck had subsided to its normal flow, Jan Straw’s body was found in a pool and taken to Greystones. All the village, and shepherds from distant cots among the hills, were bidden to the funeral. Lucy and Barbara had no time for tears. Mistress Lynn would not have it said that she had not shown honour to her old servant, and, two



days before the burial, the sisters were busy from dawn to dark baking arval cakes to be given to the guests. These little cakes were made of wheaten meal, and taken piously home, to be eaten in remembrance of the dead.

The ceremony was a solemn one in the mill-house. The old man, Peter's father, ate the arval cake with one hand over his eyes, and his figure bent as though in prayer. Peter's mother wept behind her handkerchief, and nibbled a crumb of it, saying softly :

“ In memory o' thee, Jan Straw.”

Peter, too, was not unmoved. The simplicity and pathos of the act brought tears to his honest eyes, of which he was not ashamed.

Later on John Fleming sat at one side of the fire smoking, Mistress Fleming at the other side knitting, and Peter lay on the rug between them, telling stories of Oxford, when the old man suddenly took his pipe from his mouth, and said :

“ I wish you'd marry, Peter.”

“ Marry ! Good heavens ! ”

“ I want you to settle down. Once I had other views. I thought I'd live till you could read the burial service over me—earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes, in sure and certain hope—you know how it goes. Beautiful words, them ! They kind o' sum up the big and the little o' life. Well, but now——”

He paused, took out of his pocket a large square of linen and wiped his brow.

“ I'm sorry to have disappointed you, father.”

“ I kind o' expected it,” replied the miller. “ I used to say to your mother, ‘ the lad's not the right cut for a cassock. He'd split the skirt o' it with his



long legs, rax it down the back with wrestling, and carry puppies and kitlins in the pockets.' But she—she didn't ken you as well as I did. 'Leave him alone,' she said, 'the lad's all right. You can't put an old head on young shoulders.' I wasn't for believing her. 'Zookers!' said I, 'I's an old man, but I's got a young head on my old shoulders. The lad takes after me, that he does!'

"I was hoping," Peter began, but the miller interrupted him.

"Don't be hoping anything, or pluming yourself up that I didn't mind. I've wished ever since—since—you ken when—that I'd brought you up to be a decent honest miller like myself, and had knocked them eddication notions out o' my head and your's too. They've done nowther on us any good."

"If you'd only consent to my going away—not out of the country—but to London, say, I would do something to take the sting out of your disappointment. You'd be proud of me yet."

His mother laid a gentle hand on his arm.

"Whist, lad," she whispered, "list to thy dadda."

"We're getting old," John Fleming began, then stopped to clear his throat. "We're getting old, thy mother and me, and we've no chick nor child left but you, lad. We want you to stay at home with us till we're called away."

"It won't be for long, Peter," said his mother.

"We'd like you to settle down," continued the old man. "There's money enough—the Lord has blessed me with prosperity. You can take a wife, Peter, and bring up a family. I'd like to see a grandson on my knees before I die, and know that the old mill-house will go down to another John Fleming—a sober,



God-fearing man I hope he'll be, with no book-learning to spoil his appetite for common labour. Not that I'm blaming you, lad. I couldn't have wished for a better son—in that the Lord has blessed me far beyond my deserts."

Peter grasped his father's hand and shook it without a word. The old man laughed, and slapped him on the back, then snorted, as though tears had got into his throat.

"I always have a cough when the winter comes," he said, tapping his chest.

"So you want me to get married," remarked Peter, after a while. "That's a matter for deep reflection."

"I've always wished for a daughter," replied his mother. "I cried when you were born, but thy dadda was pleased."

"There's a nice lass would just do for you, lad," said the miller, winking at his son. "She's a bonny lass with no silly ways about her. Your mother and me's kind o' fond o' her already. She looks us up whiles, and twists as purty a bow as you could wish to see for your mother's caps and bonnets."

"I guess her name," said Peter.

"It begins with L," replied the old man.

Peter got up and stretched himself.

"I'm going for a walk," he said, "it's a fine moonlight night."

"And you'll think over what I've been saying?" asked the miller.

The young man smiled, kissed his mother, and took his cap down from a nail.

"I'll tell you my decision when it's made," he replied.

## CHAPTER XIII

### JOEL TAKES THE LONG TRAIL

It was the spring of the next year, and Joel Hart sat smoking outside the store of Red Rivers Town. The hunters and trappers were returning from the forest, bringing in their winter's catch of peltries, and the place swarmed with men of many races, and all grades of colour from the ebony of the negro, up through copper to the lighter eyes and fair skin of the European.

The town was a huddled collection of log houses, built round a wooden fort. Puny, dirty, and arrogant, it yet stood boldly alone, snapping its fingers—as it were—in the face of the wilderness, and telling it that the days were numbered in which its silent places would remain tenantless, and its secrets undiscovered. The forest crowded up to its very doors, like a pack of wild creatures, gathering round the circle of its fires, but kept at bay with axe and saw.

Joel looked steadily before him. There were trees, trees, trees, nothing but fluttering leaves and solemnly waving boughs for hundreds of miles. On the fringe, where some men had been felling, lay lopped limbs, fragrant logs, and stacks of small branches; but the forest stood behind like an army, watchful, waiting, full of animosity. It threatened the town as the town threatened it. Any weakness on the part of



man would bring it forward in a riotous march, waving green triumphal banners.

For some days Red Rivers had been seething with excitement. It was rumoured that in the mountains, far beyond the forest, gold had been found. Already men were fitting themselves out to take the long trail, and Joel was one of them.

A hard and dangerous journey it would be, for, between civilisation and the Delectable Mountains, stretched first the forest, then the wilderness, silent and visibly hostile. It had balked the desires of many, and sown grass between their ribs ; it lay like a colossal dragon, like the worm Fafnir, guarding treasures that had been their bane. But as the old saga saith—Every brave man and true will fain have his hand on wealth till that last day.

For gold men will face the deadliest of foes—the Unknown. They will fight its cunning with human craftiness, its strength with endurance, its secrecy with open minds. Though perils from snakes and savage creatures, perils from savager tribes, from disease, exhaustion, hunger, and thirst, may be their daily portion, yet they will push on with a blind trust in their own good fortune. And as they go they will cheer themselves with thoughts of nuggets, large as cricket balls, which they will make the earth disgorge.

Nearly a year had passed since Joel had left High Fold. It had been a time of varied experiences. He had been dejected ; he had been lifted high. He had said that Destiny would never lead him to sip at the Fountain of Success ; he had blessed his lucky stars. He had made money, and after his former habit, lost it in a night. Sometimes the future had been a blank ;



sometimes it was lit with fantastical hopes. Occasionally the present felt like hell, oftener it drifted away—he hardly knew how—and left behind it a sense of dissatisfaction. He had soon tired of the post which Mistress Lynn's money had secured for him—there was too much drudgery in it to suit a pleasure-loving nature like his. But he kept it until he had won, by less virtuous means, enough to pay his debts to her and his friends. Then he gave it up.

But the influence of a new world, where men wrestled cheerfully with adverse circumstances, and overcame them by force of will, roused the latent manliness in him. They went forth daily—their muscles tough as steel, their bodies trained to every kind of hardship—and they came back, sometimes in a few months, rich with the rewards of their endurance. And so, when he saw men all around him strip for the contest, and some bear off the prize, he determined to do likewise.

He found an unexpected pleasure in action. Life, smacking of adventure, got hold of his imagination, and quickened his brain. An up-hill road of monotonous toil, even though it had led to honour and greater wealth, could not have spurred him to self-denial and energy, such as now regulated his thoughts. There was much of the excitement of the racecourse in the life that he was living. He looked forward eagerly to the day when he, and a small party of adventurers would set out into the Unknown, carrying their lives in their hands.

A genial glow suffused his outlook; he could see the dawn of a new life before him. He was like one watching the light broaden and deepen before the rising of the sun



A wind blew from the west, sweet with the perfume of damp wood. Few things stir the memory like a scent, and Joel's mind harked back to Cringel Forest, and the old house above the tree-tops. With luck he would be able to restore it to its former modest but honourable position among its neighbours. With luck he would yet set Lucy Lynn there as its mistress.

When he first left High Fold he had tried to thrust the memory of her pleading eyes away. To a certain extent he had succeeded; for the world to which he had come was a world of men and not of women, and no one crossed his path to waken a longing for her in his heart. He had not meant to treat her slightly, any more than he had meant to rob Mistress Lynn. He had drifted into the one, as he had drifted towards the other, through a light and reckless valuation of moral conduct, and an utter disregard of responsibility. He had written once, but things were not going well with him at the time, so his letter was short and superficial. He had meant to write again when luck changed: but luck was long in changing, and by then her form had grown indistinct.

With the awakening of his manhood, however, came a stirring of the old passion. Every part of him was quickened—both his conscience and his memory. He tried to bring her features back, but he must pay the price for having neglected her so long, and hard as he strove to imagine her as she was, her face eluded him, tantalized him, and came near only to fade away as soon as he turned his eyes upon it.

But the spirit in him, which Barbara Lynn, by her personality, had touched to consciousness for a few moments, was now fully roused, and struggling up,



through manifold weaknesses that swathed it, to take its place as the true director of his life.

He acknowledged that he had done Lucy a great wrong—wrong at the beginning and wrong afterwards—and he had made up his mind to atone for it as far as he could. He would write to her to-night—a clean confession of all that he had done amiss, before he disappeared into the wilderness for—how long? Perhaps to find a grave there.

Just now, as he sat smoking at the store-house door, looking into the forest, he seemed to see Lucy clearly. She was walking demurely down the woodland path in her best buckled shoes, which she only wore on Sundays. She appeared to be happy. Her face was as childish in its outlines, her skin as white as milk and red as roses, her eyes were as blue as when he had first kissed her. He fell into a reverie, dreading to hear a strange bird cry lest it should dispel the illusion.

The afternoon quickly passed and evening came. He stood and watched the sunset flare over the tree-tops in red and yellow—the red of blood and the yellow of gold, two colours that have striped and stained each other since ever gold was desired by the eyes of men, and blood willingly paid for it.

Joel went nearer to the forest and looked at the threshold leading to the long trail—a great doorway of primeval trees, beyond which he could see a grey-green road leading—whither? Through a hundred miles of forest! He thought what a land of trees this was to which he had come. The weight of luscious growth must give the world a tilt, he had heard a man say, like a market basket over-full at one end. One day he had climbed a hill in the neighbourhood,



and seen below him a vast expanse of green boughs, green to the horizon. Somewhere beyond them, bare and blue, were the treasure mountains that he hoped to reach.

Swamp and river, he had been warned, many a swamp and blackly-flowing river, hiding from the wholesome light of the sun under the over-arching boughs, would try to bar his path to fortune. The leaves were chiming overhead—a pleasant sound to casual ears. But he had heard that it drove men crazy. Though it were as unhallowed and insistent as the voices which haunted those Persian adventurers who were turned to stone in their endeavours to find the speaking bird, the singing tree, and the golden water—a tale which Timothy Hadwin had told him long ago—yet such was his present determination it would not have held him back. The hope of fabulous things allured Joel as it had allured the men of old.

He went into the store to write his letter to Lucy.

As he sat, pen in hand, the lovely phantom which he had seen walking in the forest with her best buckled shoes on, fled, and she assumed a solidity that disconcerted him, now he was prepared to communicate directly with her. His ready assurance vanished. What right had he to send her a letter now, after so long a silence? She was human, not faery: conjuring with a human heart had risks.

He sat for a time pondering over the past, his eyes darkened with regrets and timid with new fears. Many changes might have taken place in the dale since he bade it farewell. A letter took months to come. His letter, if he wrote now, would not reach her till the summer was in full blow. Perhaps the



great-grandmother was dead—swept away by the breath of the past winter. Lucy might be dead! Death as often took the young as the old. The silence gripped him like a night-mare. He wanted to break the suspense. So intense were his feelings, that he felt he could roll up the space which divided them, roll it up like a scroll, and see her face to face. But he could not get his hands on the impalpable, restless curtain, that shut them off from each other.

If he had been able to roll it up, he could only have seen that which would have robbed him of his energy and hope, for Lucy was in the midst of preparations for her marriage with Peter Fleming.

While he was thus pondering upon the best way to begin his letter, his eyes wandered round the store. Two flaring lamps lit it up, and added the smell of rancid oil to the strange odour of tan, hides, furs, and woods with which it was redolent. He looked at the shelves of blankets, the canoe paddles, the canisters of shot, all things alien to his experience. He felt himself to be adrift in the Unknown, going he knew not whither. He craved for a familiar sound or sight. He wanted Lucy as he had never wanted her before. He began to write and tell her so.

Then a man entered, the leader of the expedition which was going out in a few days to look for gold. He was tall and sinewy, wearing a buffalo cloak, and a hunting belt embroidered with the quills of the porcupine. He inspired confidence. He knew the Unknown, and had conquered it.

“What ho!” he said to Joel, “writing to your sweetheart? That’ sright. Tell her you’re going to seek your fortune, and will keep the first bit of gold you find to make the wedding ring.”



“That’s a good idea,” replied Joel with a laugh.

He wrote his letter. He poured out himself. He hid nothing from her, neither his weaknesses, nor his selfishness, nor the despair which he had felt, at times, when he thought of her so far away, and wondered if he would ever see her again. Perhaps he made more of this latter statement than the facts warranted, but on the whole his letter was that of an honest man who did sincerely love the woman to whom he was writing. He did not implore her to wait, but he said that if heaven sent him fortune, he would come to her—however late in the day it might be—and ask her to share it.

He ended by telling her that he would keep the first bit of gold he found for the wedding ring.

## PART II





## PART II

### CHAPTER XIV

#### BARBARA AND PETER

WINTER came to the dale, bringing snow, wind, and rain. It sneaked into the sheep-fold like a wolf, and not only into the sheep-fold, but it went down to the village, and quietly carried off some of the old folk there. Yet it did not so much as snarl at the threshold of Greystones. It ran as it were—with its tail between its legs, past the house, afraid of the great-grand-mother in the four-post bed.

Then the summer came, bringing the flocks back to the mountains, and plenty to the dale. It poured its riches into the old woman's lap, for the farm prospered. Hard on its heels followed another winter.

Mistress Fleming at the mill-house, folded her hands, and lay down in her last sleep. Her spirit slipped away in the night-time without a sigh, and Peter, standing by her bedside in the morning, and looking at the sweet old face, rosy still in death, found it hard to believe that she would not soon waken and speak to him. The miller lingered out another year, then he followed his wife.

Peter was forced to acknowledge to himself, with bitterness, that they did not find in their latter days, all the joy which they had expected. No word of



complaint ever crossed their lips, they were loving and kind, but he read in their faces a disappointment which they strove to hide, and thought they had hidden.

Not only had he failed to realise their fond hopes for him, but his marriage with Lucy lacked something, which they dimly felt, yet could not see. The girl was pretty, and sweet, and dutiful. They welcomed her with open arms. But she never took the place of a daughter to them.

When Lucy first came to the mill-house, she experienced an uplifting of her whole nature. She was treated with a respect, a dignity new to her, and she was happy, believing that she had done right in marrying Peter. But before long she began to feel the strain of living at so high an altitude. She could not reach the standard expected of her by the old couple, whose idol was their son; neither could she reach the standard of her husband, who scorned to show littlenesses of mind or temper, and would not have feared to lay his whole life open to the world, conscious of its integrity, had duty demanded such a revelation.

Peter had no place in his life for the little attentions that Lucy liked to receive. She often thought him cold; for, having once said that he loved her, he did not repeat the declaration, and she wanted him to tell her every day. She missed the fond speeches that Joel had been so ready to make; her eyes never brightened now to hear themselves extolled; her cheeks never blushed to hear their own praises. Such light language had rarely been on Peter's tongue, even when he played with her in the forest, before he thought of marriage. Having been made his wife, she was on a different footing: she was as the apple of his eye;



she was the woman he had enthroned, and he treated her with a dignity befitting her position and his own. Alas ! he expected from her a seriousness she could not give ! Neither would she enter into his pleasures—she thought them low, poor Lucy ! To gossip with Jake, the rat-catcher ; to make a pet of a dancing bear ; to wrestle on the green—were these things not low ? Joel had never done them.

No sooner had Lucy allowed her mind to dwell upon such thoughts, than she began to be restless and dissatisfied. Then Joel's letter came, many months after it had been written. She read it through and put it away with a few tears, meaning never to look at it again, as a virtuous wife should do. But she was already regretting her marriage, regarding it as bondage, and so she drew the letter from its hiding place and got into the habit of reading it often. She found in it all that she desired—devotion, adoration, repentance ; and she believed that if it had only come a few months earlier, the whole course of events would have been altered. She wrote to him, after a time, telling him of her marriage, and a good deal about her deeper thoughts. But no answer came, and she wondered if he had received her letter. Mally Ray, his old nurse, heard from him now and again, and he sent her money ; then he disappeared once more into the wilderness.

Peter's own feelings were poignant. Did he think that he had been tricked ? Who can tell, for he said nothing ? Like his old father and mother he hid his disappointment, and hid it better. He set himself, mind and will, to bring about a happier understanding between Lucy and himself. Had it not been for the fatal letter he might have achieved it, but a subtle



influence, which never showed itself, yet was none the less real, frustrated all his endeavours.

So the seasons ran on, and now Mistress Lynn wanted but one more year to make her a hundred years old.

Peter and his wife continued to live at the mill-house after the death of the old folk, but the wheel was still, and the villagers had to take their corn further afield to be ground. Lucy wanted him to sell the place, and pointed out this and that abode in the neighbourhood which might be made more comfortable and stately. Peter would not listen to the proposal. He loved the old house, and disliked the thought of parting with it, although he had no son to be brought up to be a miller, as Dusty John had desired. Had Peter been willing for any change, it would have been nothing less than the uprooting altogether of their life at High Fold. But now, though he was free to go, something kept him back.

His father had left him a modest fortune, but idleness was unattractive to him. So he still taught the village children. He gave Lucy all she could desire in ribbons and muslins and laces, and he would have given her a quiet mind if he could. As a village lass did the housework, she was able to keep her hands as soft and white as she desired, but, with no regular employment to discipline her soul, she sank into a habit of fretful impatience, and robbed her home of its repose.

Peter found interest and refreshment elsewhere. The year after his marriage, while his parents were still alive, he had started a night-school, and Barbara had come to it, brightening the bare walls and dusty benches once a week with her golden hair and blue eyes.



He found that she had developed both physically and mentally since the time, when he used to read Pope's Homer to her. She bourgeoned into leaf, like a tree, that has shown buds for many a day, but been slow to unfold. In the new relationship, which was now possible to them, they found infinite satisfaction. Barbara's smile grew softer, her strength less assertive, and there was a light in her eyes, which made them look as clear and blue as Swirtle Tarn on a sunny day. She was an apt pupil, and drank in knowledge like a creature who had long been panting to slake its thirst at that deep stream. She not only seized upon facts, but followed the subtler flow of causes underlying them with clear vision. She talked confidently to Peter of her wonders and speculations—they were the thoughts of no common mind.

Barbara lived a stimulating life through those winter evenings at the night-school. She no longer seemed to be standing on a rock, surrounded by mists, but the mists cleared away, the rock grew green. The wider out-look gave a new meaning to her own existence, for it enabled her to see its human dignity, underlying the trivialities that had disquieted her hitherto. She ceased to despise those things which the mountains had taught her. Knowledge became more valuable as she learnt some of its mysteries, so that every morsel was worth cherishing.

But deeper than the joy which Barbara felt in this expansion of her life was another joy of which she was only dimly conscious. When Peter used to read to her at Ketel's Parlour, she had once thought that if he ever blessed her with his love, she would find her highest self in giving hers to him. But this dream had quickly vanished, been dispelled by his attachment



to her sister. She saw little of him then, and less of him for some time after his marriage. Not till the night-school started did she realise how much of mutual pleasure the new relationship allowed. And thus, innocent in heart, and unaware of her power, she had thrown the spell of her personality over Peter. He influenced her also much more than she was aware of, so they drifted towards a realisation which must come sooner or later, and shake their natures to the foundation.

From week to week Barbara looked forward to the day of the night-school. She wakened in the morning with a sense of exhilaration ; her methodical movements received an energy that made the daily duties hum. Since Jan Straw's death an additional man and maid had been employed upon the farm. This set Barbara free to take up the duties which Lucy so willingly laid down upon her marriage. Old Mistress Lynn found the change admirable ; though she had demurred at first, when she thought of the extra mouths to feed and wages to pay. But Barbara stood firm. Now everything ran smoothly. Her great-grandmother was happy, and no longer disturbed by Lucy's flighty temper. She said that she desired to ride at anchor upon an even tide, until the last sailing orders came for her frail old bark to put to sea.

One evening Barbara went down the dale, her mind, as usual, in a glow of anticipation. It was early autumn and the nights were starry, unlike the nights of summer, whose radiance was dimmed by a heat haze, and a sun that seemed to set one moment but to rise the next. She welcomed the stars back to the sky. They greeted her from up yonder like well-



kent friends, and were rich compensation for the lengthening hours of darkness. Before leaving the dale to follow the road through Cringel Forest, Barbara cast a glance at the Northern Crown. She liked to link it to her own fate. It was very bright to-night, no veil of cloud obscured the glitter of its jewels, and when it was bright she said that she was happy.

She entered the forest. Far away, shining dimly through the waving branches, was the light of the school-house. She ran. On every side the leaves came fluttering down, and caught on to her hair and shawl. She shook them off, but they still trundled after her. Then she heard music and paused to listen, her senses stolen away by the sweet sounds. Peter was playing his flute in the school-room. She did not know the tune; she had not heard it before. It had a haunting cadence, that returned again and again, coming sadly at the end of a trumpet note. She thought that the music ought to have words; perhaps it had; it sounded like a song. She would ask Peter to play it for her when the school was over.

Then the melody ceased abruptly.

She opened the door and went in. The dead leaves swirled past her, and began to dance in the middle of the floor, like live things. Timothy Hadwin and Peter were sitting by the fire talking, the latter had his flute still between his fingers.

“Just look at the leaves,” said Barbara, “there was a sharp frost last night and they are coming down in showers.”

She fetched a besom from a corner to sweep them up.

But Peter stopped her.



"Nay," he replied, "they come so eagerly to school it would be a shame to turn them out."

Laughing, she put the besom away.

"What a bairn you are," she said. "I really believe that you and Timothy think they are little bits of human souls blowing about."

"Well," replied the old man triumphantly. "You don't know what they are, any more than you know what Barbara Lynn is."

She sat down on a bench, and propped up her chin with both hands.

"I admit that I don't know what I am," she answered.

"No, nor yet what a leaf is. I daresay a leaf has the power to remove mountains, like faith, but, like human beings, it doesn't know how to use it."

"You're a romancer, Timothy," said Peter.

"Young man, do you know why of all the leaves in the forest not two are alike? Is it not because there is a spirit of freedom in life however lowly?"

"Does anyone understand what life is?"

"Ah!" said Timothy, "once men knew more about these things than they do now. Long ago they healed the sick by laying their hands upon them, but here am I spending my time making potions, and electuaries, and powders. Well, good-night, children, I must go. Jake's son Joe has been eating sour apples!"

He went away with a laugh.

Barbara took her usual seat, and several men came in.

Peter's night-school was more successful than he had dared to hope. Those were days when education had to be fought for by the peasant, and books were



sealed caskets, which might, or might not, contain treasures he desired to have. So to the little forest school came a few keen and curious souls, all inspired by one motive, a sincere thirst for knowledge. From among the hills, over bog and brae, through mist, rain, and hurricane trudged a shepherd with a passion for logarithms—he afterwards gained distinction as a mathematician. Thither, also came the village cobbler, trying to piece together a theory of life more satisfactory than that offered by a very intimate knowledge of his own mind. Jake, the rat-catcher, spent a hard perspiring hour once a week, learning his alphabet. There were others also, full of eagerness to acquire, and a conviction that even a nodding acquaintance with letters was worth having.

Barbara was the only woman who glimpsed the light and strove to win it. The men would have resented her presence there had she been of a different make. As it was they shared the bench willingly with her, and she added considerably to the interest of those strenuous nights, when they wrestled with the mighty, and the trees hummed in the wind overhead, or the rain battered on the roof, or the snow blew under the door.

Peter had given a wide invitation to the village folk to come, and he promised to teach them whatever they most desired to know. He laughed at his audacity but was not ashamed of it, for he had a sincere purpose, and hoped to lead many to the fountain, from which he drew refreshment and inspiration.

To-night he seemed to be tired. When the nightly tasks were over, he usually read aloud for half an hour; he liked to send his scholars away with the rhymes of Pope, or the quaint prose of Malory, or the



great verse of Shakespeare ringing in their ears. But this evening he read listlessly, although the book was the noble and joyous history of King Arthur.

When all had gone, he still sat dreamily looking at the open page.

"Play to me," said Barbara, taking the book from his hand.

"Play! What shall I play?"

She told him how she had heard his flute as she came along the forest road.

He took the instrument, and sitting in the shadow, played the haunting little melody, that had held her spell-bound earlier in the evening.

"Is it a song, Peter?" she asked.

"Yes, I made it."

"What about, Peter?"

He smiled, but she thought that his smile was sad.

"Only my own thoughts," he replied. "Now read to me. I've a mind that you should read to me instead of I to you, for a change."

This was the part of the day that Barbara liked best of all, when, before going to the mill-house to sup with Lucy and her husband, he and she read together or talked of those things that interested them most.

"I think you're too tired to-night, Peter," said Barbara. "Let us go, and study again another time."

"Read," he said imperiously.

"What shall I read?"

"The book you took away from me when you asked me to play. Begin where I left off. There's something in King Arthur that suits my present mood."

She leaned back in her chair, and her full voice rose like the steady tolling of a bell, as she read the tale



of the Fair Maid of Astolat, who came sailing down broad Thames in a black barge with a letter in her hand to that most worshipful and peerless knight, Sir Launcelot of the Lake.

Peter shaded his eyes and watched her. He set his thoughts free from the restraint under which he had been keeping them, and gave himself the pleasure of listening to a pure, nature-voice. There was no vehemence in Barbara's tones to-night; the words came slowly and simply like the flow of a river. He glided away upon them from the school-room in Cringel Forest to the silver shine of Thames. He saw it glide by many a grey wall and steal dreamily under the trees. He was borne upon its waters by many a fair town. From Oxford to Westminster he went, and if the barge, clothed over and over in black samite, floated beside him part of the way, he forgot it, lulled into dreamy reminiscences of his college days.

How long ago it seemed to be since he had bidden them farewell, and come riding back to his native hills. He had learnt much since then, much which was a bitter daily meal to him. He was dissatisfied with himself. He had meant to be so peerless, and he felt that he had failed. He partook, in a way, of the knight's fate, for it seemed as though he must be overcome in spite of himself.

So the girl's voice, flowing smoothly like the Thames, which carried the Fair Maiden of Astolat down to Westminster, took Peter from Oxford still further away—into the ocean of self-communion. But a new inflection in Barbara's voice roused him. He heard her read the answer to the king, when he said that he loved not to be constrained to love.

“That is true,” said King Arthur and many



knights, "love is free in himself and never will be bound. . . ."

The girl looked up from her book, and met the eyes of Peter. Her hand dropped to her side, and there was silence. They knew each the mind of the other.

The revelation came suddenly. It seemed as though an aggrieved fate had got weary of seeing two honest hearts striving to hide their real feelings, and had pulled the veil aside.

They gazed across the bare floor, their thoughts leaping to mingle, and their bodies stiff like images of wood.

At last Peter made a movement.

"Barbara," he said, "you asked me if the music I played was a song. I made it out of my own thoughts. They were my thoughts about you."

A wonderful light crossed the woman's face. She knew now what it was that appealed to her in the melody. She knew that he loved her as she loved him.

She was dazzled for the moment, as by the rising of a great sun; about her voices seemed to sing; her heart was filled with an inrush of the joy and beauty of life. But he was filled with dismay, and yet a strong temptation to satisfy his passion by a touch of their hands and lips. There was nothing but the bare floor to keep them apart; no hand to strike down the arms, which they might have stretched out to each other; no one to forbid them the fervent expression of their love. Was there nothing? Their whole life lay between, a true friendship, actions which had always been honest. These stood by them in their need.

Then Barbara laid down the book, and with a brief



good-night went out into the darkness and the sighing of the forest.

Under the trees there was no light, for the star-shine could not pierce the screen of branches, and the moon was late in rising. But here and there the glow-worms were out in wandering bands, carrying their green lanterns, and, to the discerning eye, shedding a tiny search-light upon the delicate veining of fern and leaf. Barbara noticed them, for every sense was sharpened to-night. She thought of her own thoughts, which clustered about her brain like glow-worms, and made the darkness glisten. She heard the trees rustling in the wind, and the sound was musical to her ears. When it blew through a hollow it reminded her of the tones of Peter's flute. The air had a violet hue and seemed to throw a soft cloak over her.

She was exultant. She could not but rejoice to know that Peter loved her as she loved him. They had seen and recognised their kinship at last—not the kinship of sister with brother, but the kinship of soul with soul.

In this packed world of men and women they two had found each other. The bliss of realisation was hers to-night; the tragedy of realisation would be hers to-morrow. To-night she accepted that which was offered to her with a thankful heart, conscious of a sacrifice which she must soon prepare.

They loved each other. Nothing could rob her of the rapture of that knowledge. She felt herself lifted up and set upon a throne. Was this the crown that Timothy Hadwin had promised she should wear? How proudly she would place it on her head, though none could see it but herself.

When she left the trees and stood in the open dale,



she looked again at the Northern Crown. It was fading ; all the stars were fading ; a milky mistiness was over-spreading the sky. She went on, still stepping lightly, heedless of the ruts and stones through which she passed.

Suddenly there was a leap of light behind her, and her shadow fell at her feet, black and grotesque. She turned, and saw swimming out of a dip in the hills, a great silver moon.

When Barbara left Peter, he remained in the deserted room, staring into the fire. He felt no exultation, nothing but great weariness, and distaste of life. He felt that he had failed, and he had striven so hard to attain. He had injured Barbara ; he had injured Lucy ; but never wittingly. He would have sacrificed himself if by so doing he could have saved them from pain. He had walked along a perilous path, certain of his own strength and integrity, and he had never given a thought to possible disaster. He was involving others in his own ruin. He blamed himself bitterly.

He plunged into thought, wondering if there was not some way in which he could cut the net of a malicious fate from about their feet.

But he must not linger any longer in the empty school, or Lucy would think that something had happened to him or Barbara. He put out the light and locked the door. The moon was just rising but he did not see it, so dark was his own mind.

When he got home, he found Lucy sitting on a stool before the hearth, goffering the frills of a muslin cap. The room was bright, warm, and cheerful, and the supper table was set. She glanced up impatiently as he came in and said :



“How late you are. Where’s Barbara?”

“She’s gone home,” he replied. Then he let his hand fall upon her hair, and stroked it gently. It was an appeal, which she could not be expected to understand. He felt that he must make amends for his involuntary injury of her in his own heart.

She drew her head away, and opened her eyes wide in surprise.

“Why has Barbara gone home?”

Peter stood looking down at his wife. She was neat, and dainty, from her head to her feet. But her face was pale and listless, like the face of one who sat too much indoors.

“Take a walk up the dale to-morrow, Lucy,” he said, “and see Barbara and your great-grandmother. You don’t often go, I think, and a walk would do you good.”

“I’ve been out to-night,” she replied.

“Up to Greystones?”

“No, silly, only for a walk under the trees. I heard you playing your flute.”

Lucy had been to Forest Hall. She sometimes found an excuse for going to see Mally Ray, and look at the portrait of Joel’s grandfather, because it was so like Joel himself.

“I’m not hungry,” she said, “I don’t want any supper, but you’d better get yours. It’s a pity Barbara didn’t come to keep you company.”

He sat down in silence, while she continued to crimp her frills, apparently absorbed in the occupation.

“Oh,” she remarked at last with studied indifference, “I forgot to tell you. I met Mally Ray to-night and she says Joel is coming home. He’s expected soon, that’s if he took the ship he meant to take



when he wrote. He's made his fortune—lucky man."

She stole a glance at her husband. He looked old and tired and careworn. She rose slowly, not spontaneously, and sat down beside him, and patted his hand.

"Poor Peter," she said, "that night-school takes too much out of you. You should give it up."

"Shall we go away, Lucy?" he asked, almost eagerly. "Shall we shut up this house, and leave High Fold?"

"I'm not tired of it if you are," she said lightly.

She did not want to go away now that Joel was coming back. Yet she was afraid to meet him. Ever since she had written in answer to his letter she had lived in daily dread and daily hope of seeing him again.

She wondered how he would greet her.

## CHAPTER XV

### MORNING AT THE SHEPHERDS' MEET

FLAMES leaped up the chimney at Greystones, and filled the kitchen with a ruddy glow. The shutters had been taken down, but the night seemed still to hug the window-panes, and a black wind moaned in the sycamores.

Barbara, cloaked and hooded, and Tom the hind, sat with porringers on their knees, eating their breakfast of hasty pudding and milk, while the sheep dogs eyed them intelligently, now and then thumping the flags with their tails—the stark cold dawn, that was yet night, and the shepherd staves propped against the wall, were signs which quickened their canine hearts.

Twice a year the Shepherds' Meet was held in Girdlestone Pass, at the back of Thundergay, when the sheep that had strayed into other flocks, were brought to be claimed by their owners. A wether was missing from the Greystones' heaf, and three strange ewes had been found, which were now penned at Ketel's Parlour, where Barbara and the hind would pick them up on their way.

They had to start while it was still dark in order to reach the place of the Meet at a reasonably early hour.



Clatter went the clogs of the servant-lass, who tramped in and out with the sleep still in her eyes.

"You'll mind what I've told you, Jess," said Barbara, giving the dogs her empty porringer to lick.

The wench came to a standstill, then tossed her head confidently.

"Oh, aye!" she replied. "I'll not forget. I'll tie the legs o' the white coo, for fear she kicks over the pail—she's a spiteful creature, yon coo! And I'll give thy great-granny her tea at seven o'clock."

"The green tea, remember, Jess. And be sure the water is boiling."

"Oh, aye." Jess swung her head from side to side, and winked, when Barbara's back was turned, at the hind. She knew what to expect from Mistress Lynn if the old woman was not pleased with her ministrations.

"I'll speak soft and go quiet," she replied, tip-toeing into the dairy with no very light tread.

Barbara drew back the curtains of the four-poster, and looked in; she knew that Mistress Lynn was awake.

"I'm just off," she said, "Lucy will be up some time during the morning. Jess will look after you till then."

The old woman raised herself upon her pillows.

"Joel Hart comes back to-day," she remarked, her eyes brightening with pleasure.

"He should arrive about now if he caught the coach."

"I shouldn't wonder if he paid me a visit before long—eh?"

"Very likely, great-granny."

"Fetch me my best cap—the one that's rucked and trimmed with Valenciennes, and the white shawl that Peter—the wastrel—gave me."



Barbara brought the things desired and helped the old woman to adorn herself.

“Well, good luck to thee, great-granddaughter,” said Mistress Lynn, smiling and well pleased with herself. “Don’t let any o’ them fine fellows from Dove Dale or Patterdale persuade thee that there’s better farms than Greystones on t’other side o’ Thundergay.”

Barbara and the hind went out. The air was damp, and the mountain passes were choked with mist. Overhead the stars still shone, and an ungainly moon was in the act of tumbling out of sight behind the head of the dale, as they struck along the cattle-track to Swirtle Tarn.

Before dawn, in the fall of the year, the atmosphere is chilly and spiritless. The mystery of the night has gone, though the earth, to all appearance, is still under its rule. There is a uniform dulness on the landscape, while the stars grow dimmer, the mists cling closely, and life is sluggish. The wind—if a wind blows—is gusty; rain—if it falls—is listless. The brains of waking mortals are often oppressed with a sense of life’s futility.

Barbara went along the path in some such mood. After her night of rapture had followed days of depression, when she tasted the bitterness of the cup, yet shrank back from drinking it. Like Jephthah’s daughter, although she did not fear the sacrifice, she asked for a short respite to prepare herself for it. She had not seen Peter since they had read each other’s souls in silence; and to Lucy, her great-grandmother, and all with whom she came in contact, she showed a serene brow. When no one was near, however, when she was alone on the hills, with only sheep and cattle



to spy upon her, then her stricken face told of a pain that stabbed body, soul, and spirit, and was none the less real because it left no visible wounds. She tried to curtain her outlook and hide the years to come. A short view of life, so short that a day would compass it, was all that she held before her eyes each morning. Yet the future persisted in confronting her. With a stride it would come out of the darkness, and stare in her face, as much as to say—You shall not escape me. It was this attitude of the future that harrowed Barbara's mind. Present pain could be borne—she would brace herself to it; but the fear that endurance might not endure to the end, filled her with dread. Could the martyr be sure of his courage, martyrdom would be a state of exultation. It is the poltroonery of the flesh, and the trepidation of the spirit, that are his worst tormentors.

But, although Barbara was in a silent mood, Tom, the hind, was talkative.

“Have you heard,” he asked, “that a murrain has broken out among the cattle further south?”

“Nay,” replied Barbara. “Who told you?”

“A man from over the hills. He came into the Wild Boar last night, and was full of it.”

This was news, and disconcerting news.

“There's many a tall hill between us and it,” continued the hind, “but what's a hill to the murrain? The cow jumped ower the moon onced, so I was told when I was a bairn. Nay, nay, if the black bane comes, it comes by the will o' God, and there's no more to be said about it.”

“I once saw the Need Fire lit,” replied Barbara, “and the kye driven through the smoke.”

“What good did it do?” asked Tom,



“The murrain never came to Boar Dale.”

“We’d better light it again,” said the hind with a sceptical laugh. “But it’s my belief that the murrain will go up the land till it reaches John o’ Groats, and then zizzel out like a heath fire, leaving a black waste behind it. Nowt stops it but the sea.”

“You’re not a true shepherd, Tom,” said Barbara; “if you were you would hold fast to the faith of your forefathers and trust in your own good luck.”

They had reached Ketel’s Parlour, and there was a grey light in the sky. The road into Girdlestone Pass ran round the top of the tarn, and on through a deep ravine, where the mist swirled and twirled, revealing one moment a patch of barren fell, then blotting it out, rolling away like clouds of dust before the feet of an army, pouring like smoke out of the clefts, and floating by like a veil torn into shreds.

The hind unpenned the ewes, and they started along the misty track—the Robber’s Rake it was called, because popular rumour believed that Ketel, the giant, had used it when he made incursions upon the more fertile regions behind Thundergay.

Having rounded the tarn, they passed from twilight into the mist. The sky and the landscape were smudged out as though a wet hand had been drawn across the picture. The ewes moved slowly, and Barbara and her companion had not gone far, when they heard voices behind them, and she recognised the unmistakable tones of Timothy Hadwin and Peter Fleming.

The colour came and went in her face, and her heart beat quickly. She felt mingled joy and fear—joy at the prospect of seeing Peter and talking to him, fear in case she might again betray herself, and



lead him to disclose that which could not be the willing confession of so good a man.

With her knowledge of her own great love had come a consciousness of power. She knew that she held Peter's weal or woe in the hollow of her hand.

She paused and called through the mist. There was no reply for a moment. Timothy had grown deaf lately, and it seemed to Barbara that Peter, like herself, was determining upon his part.

A call came back, startlingly clear, and two blurred figures moved upwards through the mist.

"You've stolen a march upon us, Barbara," said Peter; "here's Timothy priding himself on his early rising, making sure he'd be first on the track."

It was still too dark for them to see each other distinctly, but as they went along they talked—about the state of the weather, the roads, the prospect of a hard winter, all the trivial things which fill up the greater part of human intercourse.

The mists began to boil again, and rose up like smoke, dispersing as they reached higher air, or becoming small, detached clouds, that brightened to a carnation hue, when the light glimmered along the mountains. The little company turned instinctively to the east.

It blossomed like a garden in the sky, and the rim of the sun was just visible above the hills. As they watched, it rose higher, rested for a moment, so it seemed, on the top of a craggy ridge, then heaved itself into the sky, where it hung a glittering ball of fire.

Timothy raised his hands and salaamed.

"Come away, you old sun-worshipper," said Peter, "you'll get a chill if you stop to say your orisons up here," for a wind had come with the sunrise.



“ If I were a rich man,” said Timothy, “ I’d build an altar to the sun on the highest hills, and make a law that all folks should go up twice a year and worship it. They should see the earth awake as from the grave, they should feel the passionate gladness of the dawn, they should receive strength for their labour, and inspiration for their minds. The Mystery of the Resurrection is celebrated anew every morning.”

He turned away and walked on, but, before Peter and Barbara joined him, they looked each other unflinchingly in the eyes ; where they saw nothing to make them fear.

The ravine through which the Robber’s Rake ran narrowed into a steep defile on the other side of Thundergay. Looking down into Girdlestone Pass the little inn could be seen called the Shepherd’s Rest, where many folk were already gathered—shepherds out of the surrounding dales, who had brought stray sheep from other flocks and were seeking their own lost ones.

The Meet was attended by everyone who could possibly get there. It was an opportunity for social intercourse, for the discussion of sheep-lore, or of politics ; of their own affairs, and the harmless gossip about other people’s. When the business of the day was over, the time was devoted to sports, such as racing, fox-hunting, and wrestling.

Barbara and Peter were soon separated by the crowd. There was a constant coming and going. Those who had travelled a great distance, either bringing or seeking wanderers—for a sheep will stray twenty miles over the mountains—set out at once for their far-off homes. But most of the shepherds



remained, and while the sheep were being claimed, talked with friends they had not seen, and would not see for many a long day.

Such was morning at the Shepherds' Meet, a scene in which the varied emotions of mankind made melody and discord ; for pride, jealousy, and affection, with all the notes that lie between, were there struck by the fingers of these honest fell-folk.

During the morning Barbara came across Timothy Hadwin.

"Are you tired ?" he asked her.

"No. Why ?"

"Because I am," he replied. "Come with me to the inn, and we'll drink a pot of the good wife's brewing together. She makes the best ale in the whole country side."

He slipped his hand through her arm, and the quaint little figure in the flowered waistcoat, with the silvery curls on his shoulders, and the tall golden-headed girl moved through the throng, side by side and drew many eyes.

The parlour and kitchen of the Shepherd's Rest were both full of men. Tobacco smoke, beer fumes, and the indescribable odour of duffle, that has been exposed to rain, sun, and wind, the wear and tear of months, nay, years upon the fells, made an atmosphere heavy and grey. A stout lass sprinkled the floors with fresh sand, and again and again took away the empty mugs to bring them back brimming, and dribbling with yellow froth. All morning there had never been a moment's cessation of the smoking and drinking, the loud talking and rough jesting, that accompanied the more serious business of the Meet. The polish of the brass candlesticks grew dim, and mist settled

on the windows, where it concentrated into rivulets, and ran down into pools upon the floor.

"We'll take our refectation in the open air," said Timothy putting his head in at the door.

They sat down on a bench. Near them Peter was standing, surrounded by a merry group, who were shaking him by the shoulders and slapping his back.

"No, no," Barbara heard him say. "I've given up wrestling: I'm too old."

"Too old, art tha?" replied a burly shepherd. "Let's feel thy muscles, lad."

He began to squeeze Peter's arm.

"Nowt much to complain of there," he continued. "How's thy wind?" and he thumped the young man's chest with no light hand. "Nowt wrong there nowther," he said. "Put his name down, lads, he'll wrestle."

Peter glanced across at Barbara and smiled.

Her eyes lingered lovingly upon his figure. She thought how strong and self-reliant he looked. She knew that he was not handsome, like some of the men around, but he was beautiful to her. She never wearied of studying his face, his expressions; she liked the sign of power upon his brow, and in his quiet grey eyes. She would have been proud to stand beside him in the sight of men, and claim that she was his best-beloved.

As she watched him, she felt suddenly that she was passing through a fire. Her blood tingled, and her bosom heaved as though a wild thing there was struggling to be free.

Putting her mug down she got to her feet, afraid of her own mind. A flood of passionate feeling was surging through her, sweeping away her self-restraint,



her common-sense, her respect for goodness, and her fear of wrong-doing.

She fled from the Meet, from Peter, from the seduction of her own desires and turned to Thundergay, because she trusted that its cold wind would beat out the flame, which had begun to burn in her soul. She was assailed by the Harpies, those malignant powers, who would snatch her away, if they could, and make her a slave, as they had snatched away the daughters of Pandaros in the old Greek fable.

But the Harpies were part of her own nature, and raged within her. Her self was warring against herself. She had met a fiend in her own soul, and she feared to do battle with it, where all things were favourable to its victory. But Thundergay was calm, solemn, always steadfast even in the midst of storm. So she sought the mountain solitude for help.

As she climbed up the narrow defile, the ground seemed to reel around her, and fall away from her feet. She stumbled, she was blinded, she was breathless, as though the steep ascent now made too great a demand upon her; but never before had her heart grown faint. Physically and mentally she was demoralised, as many a brave man has been before an unexpected foe.

The thing that had thus startled her was her love for Peter assuming a new and terrible aspect. For it had climbed down from its lofty seat, and gnashed its teeth at circumstance, demanding its rights. Why should it live in icy silence? Why should it not give and receive as others gave and received?

She was full of bitterness and questioning. The everlasting 'why' was written on her life; not only



on her life, but on all things ; she could not dissociate herself from her world. ' Why ' ran across the sky in flaring letters ; " why " was engraven on rock, fell, and dale. Why was anything ?

Life should be full and radiant, not stifled and stunted. It should have room to grow, and develop its manifold beauties. But her life, if she cut her love for Peter out of it, would taste like dust and ashes in her mouth. She wanted Peter ; her arms wanted him ; her heart wanted him. She desired to cherish the beloved one, who was not cherished by his own wife.

This was the thought which caused her so much bitterness. Lucy did not love Peter ; Barbara had learnt, as the years passed, why her sister had married him. Lucy had deliberately taken something which she had soon ceased to value, but no one else had the right to treasure that which she had cast aside.

With clearer air and the silence of the mountain, calmer thoughts came. She strove to hold to the belief that life was worth having, even when it meant the denial of its keenest desires. She scorned the weakness of her own nature, which made her cry so passionately for something that she knew she could never have. She had dallied too long with an importunate master ; to-day she must conquer it, and make such an assault impossible again.

She came swiftly down to Ketel's Parlour and on home. Her great-grandmother was sitting up in bed, still waiting for a visit from Joel Hart, and Lucy had not come to Greystones as she had promised.

" Oh, Lucy has a fine memory for forgetting," said the old woman. " She will have slept in this morning."



## CHAPTER XVI

### JOEL RETURNS TO THE DALE

JOEL HART returned to the dale on the day of the Shepherds' Meet. The coach set him down at an inn, twenty miles from High Fold, in the small hours of the morning; and, having hired a horse for the rest of the journey, he rode through Cringel Forest soon after day-break.

Mally Ray had cleaned the old house from cellar to garret, arranged the furniture to the best advantage, and put fires in those rooms which she considered most suitable for a young man who had made his fortune, but was still a bachelor.

She was preparing the breakfast when she heard the sound of hoofs on the road. Austere and dignified, she yet flung a shawl over her shoulders, and went out to meet him.

Yonder he came, a dusky figure on a dusky horse, riding under the bare boughs. He alighted as soon as he saw her.

"You're welcome home, Master Joel," she said, and though he had been her nursling, she shook hands with him after the fashion of her country. But her hand-shake was sincere.

"Still the same old Mally," he exclaimed with a laugh, and bending down he kissed her cheek. With

the horse's bridle over his arm, and his free hand on her shoulder, they went up the path to the house. Joel gave a swift glance round at the rank vegetation.

"There's some need of a pruning knife here," he remarked.

"Aye, Master Joel, you'll find plenty to do now you've come back. I hope you mean to stay and settle down."

He shook his head gaily.

"I'll make no promises," he replied.

He stabled his horse, wandered once round the moss-grown walk under the windows, then entered the parlour and flung himself down in a chair. Breakfast was ready, and he ate it in a strange mood. Five years in the wilderness had greatly changed him. He had lived through wider experiences, tasted fresh pleasures and disappointments, thought other thoughts. But now he had come back to the old life, and already those days were slipping away, and bygone habits reasserting themselves.

"And how are all my friends, Mally?" he asked.

"Mistress Lynn is still living, I hear. She must be a tough old stick."

"She's near a hundred."

"Good heavens! Think of living for a hundred years! Fewer will satisfy me!"

"Fewer satisfy most folk."

"Life isn't such a joyous game, is it, Mally, that you'd like to play it for ever?"

"I've no call to complain," she replied.

Joel took his pipe from his pocket and lit it.

"Neither have I," he said. "Fate kicked me badly once, but she's made up for it since. I'm a rich man, Mally."



“ I’m glad to hear it. I hope you’ll use your wealth wisely.”

“ I shall not tie it up in a napkin like great-granny Lynn. By-the-bye, I must go and see her this morning. Barbara, I suppose, still manages the farm ? ”

“ She’s a fine lass ! ” said the old woman warmly.

“ Handsome—eh ? ”

“ I’m no judge.”

“ And Lucy—is she as pretty as ever ? But now I come to think of it you didn’t consider her pretty. Well, I hope she’s living in the seventh heaven of happiness with her big booby of a husband. I never thought that Peter Fleming would marry her—Barbara was more in his line.”

Mally made no reply.

“ You’re no hand at gossiping,” he said. “ I’ll have to go to Greystones to hear the news. But tell me this—there’s a good heart—does Lucy ever ask after me ? ”

“ Whiles.”

“ Whiles ! as a Christian sister asks after a Christian brother, anxious for the state of his soul ! What sort of a man is Peter ? ”

“ He’s a good man.”

“ Oh, I heard he had brought his father’s grey hairs with sorrow to the grave ! You see I’ve not been kept in darkness all these years, though you told me very little, Mally. I fear Peter won’t have much good-will for me, since we baited his pet bear that night. Did it live or die ? ”

“ He keeps it at the mill-house. It was poor sport to set the dogs on a gently creature like yon.”

“ A low trick, Mally, I’ve thought so ever since. I’m glad it lived. But it never cared much for me.”

“It never had much cause to. You’d better keep out of its way, Master Joel.”

“I’ll not meddle with it, don’t fear.”

He got up, wandered through the house, whistled carelessly, then went out.

He stood on the road looking first north, then south. North led up to Greystones, south through the forest to the village and the old mill. He could not decide which way to take. He looked at his watch. The hour was just nine, too early for a visit to Mistress Lynn, so he went in the other direction. He had no intention of seeking Lucy, but he wanted to look at the place where she lived. He left the road, and followed a by-path which would lead him to the banks of the beck opposite to the mill, and thus he would escape having to pass through the village. He had seen the house in the early morning when it looked little more than a blot through the twilight.

Smoke was now rising from the chimneys, waving over the roof like an azure veil. The parlour window stood open, and the dimity curtains fluttered out and in with the draught.

So this was Lucy’s home—grey weather-beaten walls, an old wooden wheel, a cottage garden, and the rippling beck. There were flowers in pots upon the sill, and the curtains were gaily coloured. He thought that he would have given her a statelier house, silken window-hangings, rarer flowers. But she had not waited.

For some minutes he stood, hidden by the trees, while his eyes roved over the irregular outlines, and fixed themselves upon the window. He wished that Lucy would look out. He wanted to see her again,



to learn if he would still care for her, if her fair face would still have power to charm him.

As he watched and waited, he thought of the other women who had crossed his path in the last five years. When he had heard of Lucy's marriage, he had been overwhelmed, cast down from his high hopes into a gulf of darkness. Self-reproach and resentment had fought with each other, and had at last proclaimed a truce, for though he owned that he had done amiss, and had no right to expect that she would wait for him, seeing that he had not asked her to ; yet he bitterly resented the fact that she had so soon filled his place with another. But he was young, and having recovered somewhat from the blow, he had plunged into all the excitements that his wild life provided, and they were many, enough to drown regret—if regret can be drowned. He had amused himself with other women, but he had not loved them—they had soon wearied him, they had been stale, too ready to be won. After every fresh experience he had turned longing eyes back to the idyll of the dell in Cringel Forest. It became to him like the memory of a happy dream, a vision of Paradise, a revelation of the true meaning of love. And so he had been drawn back to the dale by the beauty and pathos of a vanished ideal. He cast longing eyes upon that part of his life ; he regarded it as the best part. For the future he hoped and expected nothing, yet found a fascination in wondering what it would bring.

But at last a movement roused him. Lucy had come into the garden, and stood looking at the sky as though wondering what the weather would be. Then she opened the gate and passed into the village street, turning in the direction of the road through the forest.



Joel's first impulse was to stay where he was, but he quickly changed his mind. Why should he hesitate to meet her? If he remained for any time at home they were bound to cross each other's path continually. Besides, he felt a great longing to look upon her face again. He retraced his steps, and came on to the road, just as she was passing over the bridge in his direction.

She did not see him at first, and he thought that she looked older and thinner. But when he moved out from among the undergrowth, a swift change passed over her features. The cheeks took on a deeper colour, the eyes, half frightened, half joyous, were raised to his. They were blue as blue skies.

Lucy had been wondering if she would meet him this morning. She had heard his horse's feet pass at daybreak, and had peeped under the curtains, but been unable to see anything save a moving shadow. She had dressed herself with greater care, pausing often to still the fluttering of her heart. After the first thrill of excitement, she became self-possessed, for she had often schooled herself to such a meeting.

She came towards him with outstretched hand.

"How are you, Joel?" she asked.

"I'm well," he replied; "and you? But I needn't enquire—you look blooming."

Thus they crossed that difficult bridge of five years.

They walked on together, and he told her about his journey, and the life he had been living since they last met.

But soon there befell a pause.

Lucy found it disconcerting.

"I'm going up to Greystones to spend the day with great-granny," she said. "Barbara and Peter have



both gone to the Shepherds' Meet in Girdlestone Pass. You remember it, don't you ? ”

“ Peter and I have wrestled there many a time,” he replied. “ I think I'll go and look him up for the sake of old times.”

They walked on in silence. Lucy wished that Joel would talk more. She half wished he would treat the love they had once had for each other as a forgotten dream. But, stealing a glance at him, she became aware of his rising emotion ; she seemed to hear it like the filling of a well with water. It frightened her.

She hurried her steps. She wanted to be out of the forest, and away from scenes that wakened sleeping memories. She knew that his eyes were upon her now, and she wondered, with that attention to trifles which the mind sometimes affects in times of great stress, whether or not he liked the new way that she dressed her hair.

“ You came very early this morning,” she said. “ You must be tired.”

“ How do you know I came early ? Were you watching for me ? ”

“ Of course. It's natural I should want to see you again—such old friends as we are.”

He laughed, glanced up and down the road, and seeing no one, took her hand.

“ It's pleasant to meet again after so many years. I came home to see you.”

“ That was foolishness, Joel,” she replied kindly.

“ Perhaps ! Through folly we get wisdom ! Ah, here we are near our trysting-place. Come and look at it, Lucy, for old time's sake.”

They were passing the little track, almost effaced



now by ferns and moss, which led to the dell, where they had spent so many joyous hours. He took her arm, and with a movement that was more of will than muscle, drew her in that direction.

His face and eyes were waking with the old love. He had wondered if it would stir again when he saw her. Now he knew that the intervening years had only fallen like dead leaves upon it; that underneath, it lay green and ready to burst into leaf, when they should be swept away.

The knowledge that she was Peter's wife angered him, but did not make him pause to restrain his feelings.

Joel's was an illogical mind—illogical by nature as well as training. He had never been able to see the true relation of events to one another, or follow a straight course without deviating from it down some byway. He strayed from the path, led by fancies instead of principles; rarely did he consult reason, or entertain reflection, or employ himself by taking a survey of the land through which he was travelling. He fell into morasses, which foresight would have shown him; he came to barriers which he could not climb, though the experience of wise men had set up a sign-post, pointing out the way, but he would not stop to read it; he reached a desert, where no water was, because he got tired of following the pilgrim's track. Yet he had always meant to do right; his failures had caused him regret.

When he brought Lucy to the dell, he stood for a moment gazing at her with a searching look. She was beautiful and desirable. But she seemed to be cold. He would stir her heart's depths and bring forgotten things to the surface. He would make tumult where there was calm.



“ Lucy,” he said, “ why didn’t you wait for me ? ”

“ Don’t let us rake up the past,” she replied, her limbs beginning to tremble, for she remembered that she was Peter’s wife. “ There’s nought to be got but ashes.”

He did not heed her.

“ Listen,” he said, bringing his head to a level with hers ; “ listen and I’ll tell you what life has been to me since we last met in this place. When I went into the wilderness I took with me the thought of you. I knew that I had done you wrong, but it was done without intention, and I said to myself, she will forgive, for she loves me. So I worked hard—men have to work hard out yonder, when they go seeking their fortunes. I suffered hunger and thirst, but counted it sweet for your sake. I sweated in the sun and shivered in the snow for your sake. There’s nothing a man can do for the woman he loves, save die for her, that I haven’t done for you.”

He drew her nearer to him, and she did not resist. She had never been able to resist the fascination of this man, who looked at her with his handsome face aglow with a passion, that Peter had never shown.

“ The first bit of gold I found,” he continued, “ I kept to make your wedding-ring. I tied it up in a handkerchief, and wore it over my heart day and night. I kept it even when I was down in my luck. But it reminded me of you, you, among the fells and dales of the home-country, waiting and longing for me. It was a foolish dream, I know. Then fortune smiled. Life looked all rose-colour, till one day I got your letter. If ever a man had climbed high with hopes, Lucy, I was that man, and if ever a man came sliding down at one blow, I was that man.”



Lucy's self-possession began to give way. She might have justified her own actions, might have poured resentment and wrath upon him. She did none of these things.

"Oh, Joel," she cried, "life is very hard and bitter. But we must make the best of it."

She made an effort to go away, before her feelings betrayed her into any deeper revelations than she had a right to make. But he caught and kissed her. She struggled to free herself, but his arms were like steel bands. If Peter had ever kissed her thus she might have become his as truly in heart as she was in name. But Peter's kisses, though kind, did not thrill her. He never swept her off her feet in the flood of an overmastering emotion. He was always quiet and self-controlled, while she loved to feel as though a stormy sea were beating upon her bosom. She did not think that his love might be more enduring than that which could rise like a tempest, but as suddenly fall again.

For Joel and Lucy, just now, five years were blotted out, five years of separation and misunderstanding. Duty, too, was swept into oblivion by their reckless hands. Heedlessly they set out in an unsound boat upon a dangerous sea, and forgot the depths below, the yawning lips of the gulf which would suck them down sooner or later to everlasting regret.

"You are mine, Lucy," whispered Joel, "you are mine. I always knew you were."

For a few minutes she lay soothed within the shelter of his arms. Then she tore herself away. Without a word, but with a scared face, she fled back through the forest to her home. There she flung herself down by a chair and wept.



She remembered that her great-grandmother would be expecting her, but she dared not confront those eagle eyes in her present state of mind.

The world had taken on a darker hue since she had gone out but a little while ago. Yesterday was grey, but it had passed serenely. To-day clouds were rolling up, and she heard the mutter of approaching thunder.

Where was peace, that she might find it ? Only in resignation. Where was happiness, that she might snatch at it ? Only in devotion to duty. Where could she turn for safety ? She felt that she was swinging over an abyss. There was safety with Peter. But resignation was a hard bed. Duty had lost its savour. And she was afraid of Peter now, for she knew that she had wronged him.

Joel remained in the dell for a while after Lucy had left him. His idyll had become a tragedy. His vision was defiled. He wondered if he should go away now, and never return. He wanted to keep Lucy as he had always thought of her—sweet, pure, dream-like. He could not do that and have her. He meant to have her. He would sacrifice his ideals to have her. How he would bring it to pass he did not know, but some time the way would open out. Had she not said that she loved him ?

He burned with hatred towards Peter, towards the man who had circumvented him. What use was his wealth to him if he must live alone, deprived of the one thing he most wanted to have ?

He might have remained there for a long time, struggling with his good and evil natures, but he was disturbed by the sudden entrance of the bear

and Jake into his solitude. The beast had a particular affection for the pool in the dell, and preferred it to all others for its daily bath.

But no sooner did it set eyes on Joel, than it began to growl and bristle up with anger.

“Hulloa, Master Joel, back again to the dale,” cried Jake.

“Back again,” he replied with assumed cheerfulness. “But it seems as though I’ve found an enemy waiting for me.”

The rat-catcher tightened his hand on the chain.

“Big Ben doesn’t often show his teeth. “Maybe you’d better hook it, master ; seems as though he’d got a memory, eh ? ”

Joel laughed, but took the the wiser part of withdrawing before the creature had strung up its ponderous limbs to deal him a blow, which would have ended his temptations for that day and many days to follow.



## CHAPTER XVII

### THE WRESTLING MATCH

JOEL looked in at Greystones on his way to the Shepherds' Meet. He would rather have passed the house by, for he was in no mood to talk to Mistress Lynn, but he did not like to seem discourteous to one who had been as kind to him as she had been.

"Why, Joel, man," she exclaimed, "thee's grown handsomer than ever. Thee always was a bonny lad, but thee'd better have a care now, or all the lasses will be making sheeps-eyes at thee up hill and down dale."

"You look very well," said Barbara.

He glanced from the old woman to her great-granddaughter, and smiled, throwing off the impatience that he felt with an effort.

"It's you who have grown handsomer, not I, Mistress Lynn," he replied. "You look nearly as young as Barbara. If you put that grand night-cap you're wearing on her head, she'd be the image of you, and you of her."

"Hoots-toots ! and me going on a hundred !" She shook her finger at him. "I's too old to have my senses turned with such babblement. I was like Barbara once, but not in your day, my lad. It's to her you should be paying your compliments, not to

her great-granny. Your grandfather gave me all I ever wanted."

She made him sit down by the four-poster, with his face to the windows, so that she could see him well.

"I couldn't pay Barbara a greater compliment," he said smoothly, yet with a glimmer of amusement in his eyes, for he saw the drift of her mind, "than by likening her to you. You and she are the handsomest, bonniest pair that I've set sight on since I last saw you both."

"Get away with you, Master Joel ; you've got far too sly a tongue for simple folk like the lassie and me."

He stayed at Greystones for half-an-hour, talking idly, and looking round the kitchen with very mingled feelings. It seemed to be just as it was the last time he had been there five years ago. Nothing was altered. The great oak table stood under the transom windows, the bridewain near the bed ; he was sure that the fire had never been allowed to die out ; and hams and three whole sheep hung curing in the chimney as he remembered they used to do. His eyes rested upon the clock. Once he had listened to it striking the hour of midnight under unhappy circumstances. Now he listened to it striking the hour of noon, under other circumstances, not less unhappy.

It was only twelve o'clock ! He had arrived at daybreak in a mood partaking more of resignation than disappointment, and already he had roused the sleeping dogs of his nature. They were in full cry after forbidden sport. He felt that he could sit no longer talking commonplaces to the old woman, and rose.

"What, off already !" she said.



“ I’m going to the Meet. Most of my old friends will be there, and it’s too good an opportunity of seeing them all to be lost. I’ll come in again on my way back. Isn’t Barbara going ? ”

“ She’s been and returned. Barbara’s a good lass and looks after her old great-granny ! The Lord will bless her ! ”

The girl walked with him to the garden gate, told him that Peter had promised to wrestle, and that he would be in time for the games if he hurried ; then she came back to the kitchen, meditatively.

The misty morning had blossomed out into a fine noon. A few showers had fallen, but the sun glanced through them, and they were not heavy enough to damp the spirits of men used to bitter winds and merciless rains.

The patch of flat ground about the Shepherds’ Rest thronged with life. Sheep, dogs, and human voices, both male and female, for the wives and daughters gathered to see the games, added to the clamour of a wild stream that rushed through the pass, below the inn. Above and all around, the grey crags and wide sweeps of heather and bracken were wrapped in sombre silence, save when a pair of herons flew screaming by to their feeding-ground on some distant tarn.

When Joel Hart came down the defile he halted for a moment to view the animated scene below him. He was drawn towards it, yet repulsed. The sight of so many well-known figures, after five years’ wandering among strangers, quickened his blood. Yet between them and him the thought of Lucy flashed. He wished that he had not come, but returned to Forest Hall, where he could have indulged his feelings for her in undisturbed retreat ; then, again, he was



glad that he had come, for he wanted to distract his mind from the still small voice of conscience which would not let him be.

His meditation had an abrupt end. Someone saw him, and his old friends—those wild young men with whom he had wasted his substance in the past—carried him off to the inn, where he ordered drinks all round.

A reckless mood came over him. He thrust the vision of Lucy into a corner, and, with a laugh that was forced, yet strove to be genial, he entered into the spirit of the crowd, which was bent on extracting out of the next few hours as much pleasure as every man could hold.

His first impulse was to avoid Peter, yet, turn where he would, the quiet grey eyes of his rival—so he had come to regard him—seemed to meet his own.

Peter knew of Lucy's early love for Joel—though she had only spoken of it once, and that was shortly after their marriage—but he was free from the suspicion, which is the bane of little minds, so he greeted the newcomer frankly and calmly, unaware of the tumult which the sight of him had roused.

Joel flung back his head with a careless gesture. In his heart of hearts he would like to have knocked Peter down. Was not Peter his supplanter? Had he not, while pretending to be his friend, lured Lucy from him? But he swept his hand across his face, and with it obliterated the hatred of his glance, for he had no desire that it should betray him.

"You're getting stout, Fleming," he said, "stout and contented-looking, as befits a married man."

"Portly, eh?" replied Peter. "Yes, I sit too much."



“Thee should whickam-whackam, spiekam-spackam more,” said a young shepherd standing by. “Old Schoolie Satherwaite had arms like a crowbar, and o’ with sugaring the cane. ‘It’s a grand receipt,’ he used to say, ‘a grand receipt for keeping the muscles in trim.’”

“He kept more than his muscles in trim,” answered another, “for he trimmed our hides to some purpose. If he couldn’t birch for aught, he birched for nought. I mind the day he called Jerry Langdale yonder into the middle of the floor, and, ‘Jerry,’ says he, ‘I’m going to larrop you.’ ‘I’s done nowt amiss,’ says Jerry, as pert as you please. ‘Nowt amiss,’ says Schoolie, ‘Good God, that’s unnatural. I’ll have to bensal the natural man back intil you, and so circumvent the deevil.’ Jerry got such a warming that it kept the frost out for many a day.”

“Peter’s over-gentlemanly with the rascals,” said one.

“Peter can use the rod when he likes,” replied another, nudging Fleming in the ribs. “I heard tell how you spanked Jake’s Joie, and o’ for telling a lie. Joie’s mother told me that he took his porridge standing for a week after, and he’s been a truthfuller lad ever since.”

Peter pulled out his watch.

“Time is running on, lads,” he said. “I’d better go and get ready to wrestle, or you’ll give me no credit for having kept my muscles in trim with switching the bairns.”

Joel was left with his own particular friends. They were not much liked by the shepherds, for they gave themselves airs; but they spent their money freely, and were treated with a certain amount of good-humour and respect.



Joel Hart was a lucky dog, they said, to go away and come back after five years a rich man. They had trudged along the same old paths, but not one of them had managed to find the goose that lays the golden eggs. There was not much wealth to be got out of the dales and fells. They had half a mind to try their fortunes overseas. They would have no misgivings, but most of them had married a wife. Joel was a wise man not to tie himself to a woman's apron-strings before he went away. Now he had come home, of course he would marry, and rear a progeny to make ducks and drakes of his money. That was always the way of it. Would he stay now he had come back? or would they find him gone again some fine morning?

Joel unbent under the combined effects of home-brewed ale, and lively companionship. He did not know if he would remain at Forest Hall. When he was out in the wilds he used to think his home the most beautiful spot on the earth, but he was not sure that he might not soon grow tired of it now, after the life he had been leading. He had no intention of taking a wife unless they could show him a lass that would cap his fancy.

But whether he stayed or not, he was glad to be back among his own folk again. Out in the wilderness he had often longed for a sight of a familiar face, and the sound of the Northern tongue. His arrival was most opportune, for he would have been sorry to miss the Shepherds' Meet.

Six years ago they had had a great time—did they remember? John Wheeler, the champion wrestler, had come, and given the native talent high praise. He had shown some of them—himself for one, and



Peter Fleming for another—a few tricks. Wheeler dead since then! Ah! that was a pity! He was one of the few champions who belonged to the good old Westmorland stock.

“Out at the gold diggings,” Joel continued, “there were two or three men who could wrestle. We often had a bout of an evening in front of the drinking booth.”

“Wrestle now,” said one. “There’s your old friend Peter Fleming longing to try a fall with you, I don’t doubt. Come along, man. No shaking of your head now. Lord! That’s a good idea. We’ve not seen any decent wrestling since you went away.”

Joel was carried off, making half-hearted protests. His mind was full of confused thoughts. He was gratified at the manner in which his old friends had received him; he felt a return of the reckless spirit that had always awakened in their company; moreover, he would like to throw Peter. He must double up that strong figure in ignominy; he must pay back old scores, and new ones also. Though Fleming was more muscular than he, yet his was the greater quickness and subtlety of action. He would come off victor.

He thought of Lucy, and emotion again rushed through his brain like a stream in spate, carrying reason before it.

But when he entered the ring he felt cool. He had a purpose to fulfil, and this gave him the full command of his senses. He knew now that, through the years of his absence, he had been moved with a vague antipathy towards this man. Their old friendship had been but a veil drawn over the blind face of hate.



From the beginning they had been doomed to circumvent one another. Peter had circumvented him by marrying Lucy ; the time had arrived for him to overcome Peter.

That the occasion for wiping out the score was only a wrestling-match in a mountain pass did not take away from its significance. To the onlookers it was but a trial of strength and cunning ; to Joel it had a deep human meaning. Not as a friendly rival did he now confront his antagonist, but as an embodied vengeance, determined to mark upon his adversary the humiliation which he had received at the other's hands.

Joel got strength, far beyond his physical powers, through the intensity of his passion. It was a spiritual strength, derived from a spiritual source, though not from the well of light. It bubbled up in a dark region where lost souls come to drink, and those who have wandered from the right path to seek forbidden things.

Peter confronted Joel with a gay laugh, unconscious of the conditions under which they were to wrestle. Peter played the game for the game's sake, and though he was keen to acquit himself worthily, yet he could take a fall, and think no worse of himself or like his conqueror less for it.

But now, as he and Joel swayed together with their hands locked behind each other's backs, he became aware of something unusual in the struggle. He could not have defined what it was, yet of its presence and force he had no doubt. Its effect upon himself was annoying. His good-humour left him. Over his mind came a chilling influence. He tried to shake it off, but in vain. He felt sure that he was



wrestling for more than the barren triumph of muscle over muscle, but for what ?

Had it not been for the strength which his feelings gave him, Joel would soon have measured a fall. As it was he exerted a force like that of a glacier, not swift, but slow, ever driven on by the sullen weight behind it, for Joel's hate was cold, not hot ; callous not furious.

Peter's anger increased. He felt that he had been entrapped into a combat which he would have scorned had he known. The honest wrestling of the dales-folk was being lowered to serve the purposes of personal ill-will. He could not withdraw honourably—no rule had been infringed—yet he loathed the stake for which they struggled. His spirit disdained the thought of heating itself in a common brawl. He had not the inclination, even if he had had the time, to wonder at the reason for Joel's attitude towards himself. When two men are at grips with each other, there is little opportunity for reflection or philosophising. Thoughts that do come, come like pictures flashed upon a screen, and are switched away in a moment, leaving behind a vague impression of their significance.

Before long the bystanders began to realise that in the wrestling of Peter and Joel there was an unusual element. At first they showed their interest without restraint, but, as the struggle grew keener, though neither had the mastery, feeling ran too strongly for much sound. A sudden shout, a long-drawn breath, a murmur that broke off abruptly, eyes which would not suffer the lids to blink, and hands that gripped the hurdles as though they clung for life, were the measure of their excitement. Those gathered round the ring were thrilled by such passions as must have



swayed men at a gladiatorial show, when men fought for their lives.

The wrestlers grew heated ; their bodies smoked ; their lips curled back from their teeth ; their eyes were bright. The spirit of the savage still sleeps in every man. In Peter it began to awaken, roused by the clutch of Joel's hands. The refinements of civilisation were in danger of falling away from him, and leaving him a creature of brute force, whose one idea was to bear down his enemy with cunning and superior strength. But he drew himself together ; he had never lost control of his nature, and he would not do so now. Amid the ferment of his impulses he strove to be calm, to be resistless yet not fierce, to overcome, but without anger.

The feeling of the spectators was intensified, as they saw the two figures become motionless, though the veins on their arms stood up like cords, and their bodies were bent in such a manner as showed the straining of the great muscles of their backs and shoulders. Two figures modelled in clay they might have been, instead of two struggling forces.

Neither would give in. Their breasts laboured with painful breathing, the breath whistled as it came and went. Down their brows poured the sweat, making their faces shine in the yellow light of the November sun. Their hair was clotted, their shirts were drenched as though they had been dipped in the beck.

Peter felt his head grow dizzy. He thought that his temples would burst with the hammering of his blood. The sun got into his eyes and dazzled them, and, though he managed to shift his position, the glitter of it had already filled his brain.

He seemed to catch a vision of Lucy, sitting quietly



at home. He wondered if she would ever come to know of the fierce battle fought for her sake. Apart from his direct consciousness, his mind had gone on working, and reached the conclusion that Joel's madness sprang out of his love for her.

The day was drawing to a close. Clouds were hurrying up from the south-west, and reflecting a lurid glow down into the pass. Soon there would be rain and night.

Joel made a supreme effort to throw Peter. He rallied all his failing powers, his face grew purple, he bent to give the last swing which should lift his adversary from his feet, when he slipped and fell.

There was a loud cheer from the onlookers ; they leaped over the hurdles to shake Peter by the hand ; the ring surged with men and dogs. Then silence fell, and hushed the words on men's tongues even when they did not know the cause.

Joel lay on the ground, his face ghastly as that of a corpse, while a red stream trickled from his mouth.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### BY THE CRESSET'S LIGHT

BARBARA was alone at Ketel's Parlour. A lighted lamp hung from a hook in the ceiling, and a fire smouldered on a slab of blue slate, while the smoke escaped through a cleft in the wall. Outside was night, starless and black, though the hour was not much later than seven o'clock. Not long ago she had heard the village folk returning from the Meet, but they went home by a track on the other side of the beck, and did not come near the cave.

Barbara wanted to think, and, in order to think clearly, she must be alone. The huge fire at Grey-stones, that made every corner of the kitchen as bright as noon, and the alert old woman in the four-poster, prevented any such deep meditation as she craved. But as the work of the day was over, and Jess, the servant-lass, had sat down to spin by the ingle, she could absent herself for a while with a clear conscience.

The cave was part of herself. Its rocky walls seemed to have taken on the impression of her thoughts. She had stamped her personality upon it, and loved it as the habitation of her spirit. Here she was free, though free nowhere else in the world; here she shook off the cloak under which she hid her true



being ; here she could meet herself face to face without fear of prying eyes.

There was a charm in the cave which fitted her every mood. Were she happy, the spring that bubbled out of the floor and ran sparkling among the stones, laughed in unison with her. Were she sad, no sunlight could come here to stare and mock. Were she weary, yonder was a couch of heather and sheepskins for her body, and a silence that hung around her brain like a curtain. Did she feel herself inspired to pray, the walls and the dim light were solemn as those of a shrine.

Peter had given her the cresset lamp, and she had brought her books here, keeping them in an oak chest which she had found at Greystones, that preserved them from damp.

She knew the cave so well—every stone on the floor, every crack in the walls where tiny ferns grew—that she could have found her way about it blindfold. She often thought that, when she came to die, Ketel's Parlour would remain the most vivid picture in her mind.

Death was a familiar meditation to Barbara. She met it so often that it forced itself upon her notice. The destroyer tramped the fells even in summer-time, taking his toll of sheep and lambs, and now and then snatching away a man. But when winter came, with its storms of wind and rain ; when it held the beckes stiff behind icy bars ; when it filled the gullies with drifting snow and levelled dangerous slopes, then it seemed to be a miracle that any living thing should come through it alive. Time and again, between November and March, those whose work took them to the great wastes, would face death, would go where



a slip was destruction, where presence of mind, and swift, unerring action meant life ; where nothing but the instinct that is born in some men, added to hard-won experience, could bring them safe and sound out of the valley of the shadow to their own hearth-stones.

Barbara often wondered how her own end would come. Would she be like a shepherd, who had gone out one wild night to bring the ewes to a more sheltered spot, and who was blown over a precipice ? Would she fall into a drift when helping to dig out the sheep, and perish of the suffocating snow in which a sheep may live, but not a human being ? Would she grow dizzy when climbing some steep ascent, and fall down to be dashed on the rocks below ? Or would she, like her great-grandmother, live for a hundred years, and die at last in the four-poster, with the bridewain on one side of her and the dresser on the other ?

No ; anything but that. She hoped that death would not forget her, as it had forgotten Mistress Lynn, that grim, grey, human Sphynx, which could look back along the years for a century. That such a lot might be hers filled the girl with horror. But she would not believe it. She cared not how death came, but she hoped he would not tarry, for life held nothing now that could make her wish to live. Life was full of renunciation and sacrifice, and she was tired of striving after righteousness.

She had not been long alone when she heard a voice calling her :

“ Barbara ! Barbara ! ”

Absorbed in her thoughts, she imagined that the voice came from her inner consciousness, and was spirit speaking unto spirit. But it called again, and



this time fell upon her ear with unmistakable urgency :

“ Barbara ! ”

Lucy was running across the slope, towards the light issuing from the cavern's doorway. She looked excited, her cheeks were aflame, her eyes shining.

“ You must come with me,” she cried. “ You must come at once, over the Robber's Rake to the Shepherd's Rest. Joel is dying.”

She took her sister's hand, and began to draw her towards the door.

“ Sit down, Lucy, and calm thyself,” said Barbara.

“ Sit down ! Nay, I tell you we must go at once. Come, there is no time to lose. He may be dead before we see him.”

“ I don't understand,” said Barbara.

She stood under the cresset's light like a rock, while Lucy, like a wave, fretted about her. Exasperating to such a nature as Lucy's was her sister's calmness.

“ Oh ! you don't understand,” she cried. “ You never have understood. You have a heart like a lump of ice. You have always been against Joel and me. It is you who thrust us apart. But, now that he is dying, I thought you'd relent. Still, I'll go——”

“ Has he sent for you ? ”

“ Nay ! I tell you he's dying. Oh, Joel, Joel, to think you should be leaving me again so soon. But I'm coming, yes, I'm coming.”

The girl wrung her hands, looked wildly round, then her face hardened.

“ If you'll not come, I'll go alone,” she said. “ I'm not afraid of the dark.”

But Barbara barred the doorway. She pointed to

the stool from which she had risen. "Sit down," she said, "and tell me what you know. Then, if you're determined to go, I'll go too."

"Joel may be dead by then."

"Whether he lives or dies is not in your hands. It's not to you, Lucy, that his soul will be given."

"Oh, I wish I had passed by and left you alone. I might have known, I might have had more sense, than think you would feel for me. You were always hard as flint, though I used to believe you were a saint. But don't cast me off, Barbara. I'm very miserable."

Barbara knelt down by the distracted girl, and put her arms round her.

"What is wrong with Joel?" she asked softly.

"He's dying, oh God, he's dying, and I'm not there to bid him good-bye."

Then, amid sobs, she told her sister all that she knew, about the way Joel and Peter had wrestled, and how Joel had strained himself and broken a blood-vessel. He was now lying at the Shepherd's Rest, attended by Timothy Hadwin and her husband. Peter had sent her word that he could not get home that night.

"I'll never forgive Peter," wept Lucy. "He oughtn't to have wrestled. He knows I hate wrestling. I've always hated it. Perhaps I knew at the back of my mind it would some day bring trouble to me."

"This is childish, Lucy," said Barbara, with a note of revolt in her voice. She scorned her sister for preferring Joel to Peter. Joel had nothing to recommend him save his physical perfection, and his old name. His claim to sympathy, his affectionate nature, had never touched her, so she failed to realise their effect on Lucy. If Peter had been her husband, she



would have found a glory in loving where duty pointed. Alas, duty bade her pluck out her love and cast it from her.

Barbara had known for a long time that her sister was not happy. There was less simplicity in her manners than of old, less desire to please, and much less concern about her fine clothes and good looks. That she was nursing vain regrets Barbara needed no telling to know, and she had hoped often that Joel would not return. Providence had willed it otherwise. For the stricken creature nothing remained but to turn its face from temptation, and follow the straight and narrow way, with grace if possible, at all costs with determination. But Lucy had no intention of keeping to so strict a path.

“Come,” she said.

Barbara rose slowly from her knees. She knew that Lucy must not go. She went to the doorway, and stood for a moment looking out. The night was dark with clouds, and wind came shuffling over the grass at fitful intervals. Now and again she heard the tinkle of waves breaking on the shores of Swirtle Tarn ; near at hand a sheep called, and was answered by another and yet another, till the mournful bleat of the most distant member of the flock died upon her ear.

Lucy stared at her sister's back. She did not get off her stool for, impulsive and excited as she was, stubborn too at times, she read something in Barbara's pose that kept her silent. The firelight lit up the shining hair pleated round the fine large head ; one lock had become loose and hung down upon her shoulder. She looked like a tower of strength to the fearful heart, but to the antagonist she was a fortress that no assault could take.

Barbara never dealt in vague reasonings, or tried to veil the face of denial to make it look less stern. She had called her own feelings of the morning by no condoning name, and she now turned to Lucy with firm lips and eyes.

"You must go home, Lucy," she said, "back to the mill-house, and wait there for Peter. He is kind, and will not keep you long in suspense, wondering whether Joel is alive or dead. If he lives you can have no place in his life; if he dies you can't help him on his way."

"I'll at least bid him good-bye. Don't waste any more breath on me. Barbara. I've made up my mind to go."

"Then you will blacken both your souls, and such stains won't wash out."

"What do you mean?" asked Lucy, turning her face away.

"You know what I mean. You're letting your mind run after a man that's not your husband. The Bible calls it by a black name, in thought as well as deed." Barbara lifted her sister's face between her hands, and looked at it for a moment. "Lucy," she continued, "you've always been proud of your fair skin and your white body, but that sort of mind, the mind you're letting yourself get, is ugly—ugly as a toad."

Lucy twisted herself away with repulsion.

"You've a bonny way of putting things," she replied haughtily, but her lips quivered. She abhorred toads. From being a child, the sight of them had filled her with loathing; they seemed too ugly to have been created. And now Barbara said her mind was becoming like one.



“You don’t understand,” she cried. “You’re so high and mighty you couldn’t love a man as I love Joel. If you did you’d find a kindlier name for it than saying it’s like something that turns you sick to look at it.”

Could she have seen her sister’s face just then she would have been dumbfounded by the change that passed over it. Throat and cheek and chin became suffused with a passionate glow, and her lips quivered. But in a moment the flood sank back again, leaving her pale and weary-eyed.

“We’ve had a warning set us since we were born,” she said. “I mean great-granny. Neither of us would like to grow old in her way.”

“I never should. But you might, Barbara, for everyone says that you’re her living picture. And your heart doesn’t come far short of hers for hardness.”

Barbara winced, and Lucy, ever ready to make amends for her sharp words, grasped her sister’s hand.

“Don’t heed me,” she said, “I’m beside myself. There’s no fear of either of us following in great-granny’s steps.”

“She let her mind stray where it had no right to,” continued Barbara. “And you know what comfort it brought her. She grew to hate her husband, and she cared nothing for her children. But her life was loveless and a blank ; still, she had to give her heart to something ; so must all men and women. We’re made that way and can’t alter it. You know where she gave her heart—it’s in her money-bags.”

A picture flashed across Lucy’s mind of the sight she had seen when she had looked through the door on the night of the wake long ago. She remembered with curious distinctness the stealthy movements of



the thin old hands, as they counted the coins. Another scene rose before her ; she saw Cringel Forest, and the dell where she and Joel used to meet. She saw it in summer-time, gay with blue-bells ; she saw it again in winter. She thought how she and Joel had met there only a few hours ago. Come spring, come autumn, still she loved and was loved. Back swung her mind to the old woman in the great bed, giving up her soul to the hoarding of money. Could this last scene be the outcome of such an one as that of the morning ? She saw herself old and grey—the beauty of life and its warmth fled ; and dead her heart to all joy in the sun and the flowers ; gone the sympathy of her soul with other souls ; hardened into indifference the power of loving and careless of being loved. Could her soul grow like that ? like her great-grandmother's ?

“ You're hawering,” she said. “ I'm no more like her than I'm like a corby-crow.”

Still she was ill at ease.

“ Won't you go away home now ? ” said Barbara.

Lucy had half a mind to say that she would not go. But her blood had cooled, and her reason began to reassert itself. She was dominated by her sister's will and mortally afraid of the long dark track into Girdlestone Pass. She rose and drew her cloak closer around her.

“ If Joel dies,” she said, tears filling her eyes, “ you'll have it on your conscience that you kept us apart when we might have given each other some cheer to carry us along our dark ways.”

“ Lucy, Lucy,” cried Barbara, “ put Joel out of your head. You've got a good husband, better no woman ever had. Can't you give all your love to



him ? Make him happy. You'll be happy then yourself. You'll find life worth living, better worth living than great-grandmother's has been ; better, far better than mine. Mine's a lonely life, Lucy. There'll never be home and husband for me. But, down at the mill-house yonder, love is waiting for you. For your own sake, for Peter's sake, for Joel's sake, too, cleave to the man you've taken for better and worse."

" You should have married him yourself," replied Lucy, with a somewhat uneasy glance.

" It was not I that Peter chose for his wife," said Barbara simply.

Just then the herd brought a message from Mistress Lynn to know how much longer Barbara was going to linger at the cave.

" Tell her I've something to do that'll keep me here awhile," replied she.

Lucy bade her sister good-night and went away with the herd. She no longer wanted to fly to the sick bed of the man she loved. Weariness succeeded her passion of the morning and excitement of the night. Barbara always had this effect upon her sister. When she opened her heart to her, Barbara put it in a cleansing fire, and, though the process might be painful, it was morally purifying.

When Lucy and Tom had gone, Barbara put her hands to her head, and lifted the locks that lay so heavily upon her brow. Then she stirred the peats into flame. Her face was very white, and looked suddenly old.

All the time that she had been reasoning with Lucy she had been reasoning with herself. She had dealt with herself so severely that she was now ready to give that which conscience demanded.



She opened the oak chest. There lay her few treasures—books which Peter had given her, that she cherished more than she would have done jewels. She caught her lip between her teeth, but the hesitation was mental, not moral. Like Lucy, she was seeing visions.

She saw herself sitting in the schoolroom, reading these books, feeding her hungry mind upon the feast that they spread for her. But they were all associated with Peter, she had read them in the light of his mind, he had shared them with her. She could not look at them without, at the same time, seeing the face of her dearly-loved master.

Then she saw herself growing old, with haunted eyes, with disappointed heart, longing for that which could never be, and soured by the denial.

Then she saw herself as she meant to be. She was free, because her own soul's master. She was full, because she had renounced ; she loved still, but with no desire for recompense, no thought of return, giving out perpetually like the sun, but not receiving.

To attain such a height she must cut off her right hand and pluck out her right eye. She must set her face firmly in the direction she meant to go. It would be a road of toil, loneliness, sacrifice. She must never cast so much as a glance at that other path, with all its alluring lights and gorgeous flowers, which yet smelt of death.

She lifted the books one by one, and laid them on the fire. The white pages grew luminous, the black letters grew blacker, a splash, like blood, blotted them out ; they rolled up like a scroll and fell to ashes.

Peter Fleming came to the cave on his way home ; for he saw the light. Joel was better, and as Timothy



was remaining behind at the Shepherd's Rest with him, there was no reason why he should stay.

Barbara did not hear the shuffle of his feet on the grass ; and unknown to her he was a witness to her action of burning her books. He stood for a moment, hesitated whether to speak, then stole away, as though he had been prying into a secret chamber that his eyes had no right to see.

He knew that Barbara would come no more to the night-school. He understood her reasons, and bitterly reproached himself for the sorrow that he had brought upon her. He thought of her fine soul and deplored the narrowing and stifling of her intellect, that must follow this deliberate cutting off of herself from such sources of life.

Yet he felt exalted too. In spite of all, he was lifted up by the knowledge of her strength. She seemed to rise and fill the night with her spreading hair, and wide blue eyes, an embodiment of the power of love, which holds all human hearts in the hollow of its immortal hands.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE SHEPHERD'S REST

JOEL HART sat on a bench, staring at the fire in the kitchen of the Shepherd's Rest. Timothy Hadwin was bending over a basket of moss and late mountain flowers, dissecting them with a small scalpel, while he held a magnifying glass in his left hand through which he continually peered. The good dame of the inn was spinning, and the whirr of the wheels' rapid turning made a pleasant hum in the room, like the buzzing of bees. Her good man had gone to the nearest market town on business.

Outside a cold white mist hugged the fells. Little could be seen but a patch of monotonous landscape in front of the inn, and nothing heard save the thunder of the beck which was in spate.

Joel was silent, preoccupied with his thoughts or else sunk in a melancholy mood. Timothy looked at him from under his mild brows, then took a pinch of snuff, and leaning back in his chair said :

“ You'll soon be well enough to go home, Joel.”

There was no answer. Either the young man had not heard, or he did not want to talk.

“ Aye, he's gotten on gaily,” said the inn-keeper's wife, a little woman with beady black eyes and a smile that could be both kindly and malicious. “ He owes



his life to you, Master Hadwin. You couldn't have treated him better if he'd been your own son. But he wants waking up now. Come, come, young gentleman, look as though you were glad to be sitting in Jamie Brown's warm kitchen, and not lying cold and stark in the kirk-garth."

Joel raised himself with an effort.

"I'm not sure," he replied, attempting a laugh, "that the kirk-garth wouldn't be a better place for me. This sickness has taken all the sap out of my limbs. I feel like a rotten tree, just waiting for the first wind that blows to fling it down."

"You're needing a cherry cordial to put new life into you," said the dame, and she bustled to her press, bringing out a bottle that shone like a ruby in the genial fire-glow.

"Cherry cordial," he answered, "it's something stronger than cherry cordial that I need."

"Take my advice, young master, and don't drink any more wine to-day. You've had as much as is good for you. Now sup this up. It'll put a little colour into your white whisht-face, without addling your brains."

Joel drank, then set the glass on the bench beside him. For a while longer he remained in a state of gloomy silence, but a glow began to steal over his body, and soon loosened his tongue.

"I once heard of a man," he said, "that strained himself as I did, but he died. For a twelve month and a day afterwards he came out of his grave every night, and sucked the veins of living folk until he had gained what he'd lost. Then he slept quietly."

"An uncanny tale," replied the good wife. "I wouldn't think of it if I was you. There's a long

life and a merry one before you yet. Be cheery now."

"It was only one man whose blood he sucked," he said as though it were an afterthought. Then he flung back his head and turned to Timothy. "Shall we have a game at chess?" he asked. "You were going to teach me a new move. Chess is a game worth playing, though I used to despise it. I thought it slow. Do you know, I get great amusement out of giving all the pieces the names of my friends, and seeing how they check-mate one another."

The old man got up with alacrity. He was always glad to interest Joel in anything that would take the spleen from his voice and the dis-spirited look from his face. As a physician of the soul as well as the body, he desired to pour a healing balm on the hidden wound, which he saw was causing suffering of an intense nature. Timothy had found the thread which led him through the gloomy, cavernlike mind of the young man. He saw that which was seated in the innermost depths of his being. But, so far, all his efforts had been unable to dispel it.

He got out the chess board, drew the table to the fire, and began to give his pupil a lesson. Joel's interest seemed to be centred upon one particular piece, and he watched all its movements with the eagerness of a child.

"It was a good idea of yours, Timothy, to teach me the game," he said once or twice. "On beastly days like this, when no one is likely to pay us a visit, it passes the time—eh?"

"I used to be a great chess-player when I was a young man," replied Timothy, "but I was afraid I had forgotten a great deal until I began to show you the



way. It's pleasant to sit in the fire-glow, when the storms of life are over and revive old habits. It makes one feel young again."

While they were thus absorbed, the sound of many hoofs drew near.

"List," said the good-wife, "there's Red Geordie and the pack horses. He'll cheer us up a bit. He's better than a town-crier any day for telling the news."

Joel looked through the fire-window under which he sat—it was a little window in the chimney—and saw, coming out of the mist, a string of horses led by a black stallion. At the end of the trail rode a man on a stout little galloway. His coat collar was pulled up to his eyes, and a fur cap, with a sprig of bog myrtle in it, was drawn well down upon his brows. The black stallion stopped of its own accord at the inn door, and its train of followers halted also, and began to nibble the turf by the road side.

Their master stirred his pony, and, in a few moments, entered the kitchen, shaking the dew from his cap. He was a man of medium height, squarely built, with a bald head, and a fringe of red hair and whiskers, that framed his face in a fearsome manner.

"Come to the fire," said the good-wife, pushing up a chair, "come and warm thyself."

"That I will, mistress, and thank you kindly. It's a raw day, masters, better in than out. And how goes the world with all of you?"

He nodded to Joel and Timothy with a friendly laugh.

"How goes the world?" exclaimed the dame. "Sometimes this way, sometimes that; whiles it runs straight, whiles agee; whiles smooth, and whiles like a clog wheel. But we've been lively lately, for

this time o' year. We've had a wheen visitors since the Meet, folk coming and going to see Master Joel Hart yonder. He's been ill. You'll have heard of it, Geordie, on your way up the country."

"Master Hart, of course!" the new comer bent forward, peering into Joel's face with his little sharp eyes. "Sakes! man, how thoo's changed. I shouldn't have knowed tha. But welcome, welcome back, my hearty. Twice welcome since thoo comes with well-feathered pockets."

He shook hands with zest.

"And how fend tha noo, Master Joel?" he asked.

"Gaily," replied Joel in an off-hand manner.

"He's nobbut very sweemish," interposed the good-wife, with just a touch of malice in her tones. "He wants cheering up a bit."

Red Geordie slapped his thigh and laughed.

"It's the lassies he's missing," he said, "mistress, mistress, thoo should have 'ticed up a posey o' bonny faces for him to look at."

"To the Girdlestone in this weather!" she replied.

"If thoo said, 'Here's a fine bird worth the picking,' they'd have come like a flock of starlings after a bone, aye, would they."

Joel turned away with a haughty shrug of his shoulders, and Red Geordie sniggered, in no way disconcerted.

"Well, what's been adoing down-by?" asked the dame, anxious not to offend her lordly guest.

"Marrying, kersening, and burying—just the day's work o' common folk."

"Day's work, says you! It's little we sees o' such goings on in the Girdlestone, saving the mating o' wind and rain, the birth o' snowstorm, and the death



o' summer on the fells. Be canny now and tell us o' the news. Whose married? whose been kirsened? and whose dead down-by?"

"Well," replied Red Geordie, sipping his mulled ale with satisfaction, "there's triplets in Troutbeck, and they's been called Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego."

"Sakes alive! it's enough to make Anabaptists o' them; they'll be wanting to be rekirstened when they're grown up. Whatever was their mother thinking o' to lay such a saddle on the lad-bairns's backs?"

Red Geordie tossed off his ale and handed the mug back to be filled again.

"Pack horses, pack horses," he cried, "hey, mistress, we're all pack horses on the road. Some on us carries one thing, some on us carries another; some has his mother's follies, and some his dad's sins, forbye the sins and follies of his own getting."

"Aye, it's a wonder when you come to think o' it—the cross-bred sheep we be!" said the good-wife.

Red Geordie again handed back his mug.

"I'll have another glass, mistress, with a dash more nutmeg in it to warm the thrapple. Now, Master Camomile, what kind o' fate would you foretell for the three lad bairns, born at a birth? They ought to turn out something by-ordinary."

Timothy shook his head.

"Doubtless they will suffer the common lot of man," he replied, "and pass through the fiery furnace of tribulation like other folks. Happy will they be if they can sing with the Hebrew children, 'Oh, ye fire and heat, bless ye the Lord, praise Him and magnify Him for ever.'"

Joel looked up quickly.



“I never believed the story,” he said, “men don’t praise God in the midst of the fiery furnace. They’re more likely to curse Him.”

Ever since the pack-master’s rollicking personality had entered the inn kitchen, Joel had kept a moody silence. He disliked the quizzical glance of the man; and the bald head, with its upstanding fringe of red hair, raised an unreasonable antipathy in his mind. If the weather had not been so cold and damp, he would have left his seat in the ingle-nook and gone out, preferring the mist to becoming the target for Red Geordie’s eyes.

His sudden outburst caused an uneasy pause, not so much because of the words, but the intensity with which they were spoken. They seemed to have been thrown off from the man’s mind as smoke is thrown up from a volcano. They were the sign of the fires burning within him.

“Heigh-ho,” exclaimed Red Geordie, who felt it his duty to restore the conversation to a more natural tone, “I’ll have to be taking the road again. It’s a dree day for a body to be riding through the Girdlestone, a dree day, but less dree than it used to be before the Shepherd’s Rest was built. I mind well, when the snow lay on the fells, and wind swept down them like a beast, trying to snap off your fingers and toes, and there was neither inn nor cot for twenty miles! Those were days! I’ve seen me riding with a matchlock over my shoulder and a brace of pistols in my belt, like any rumbustical cateran. What with robbers and winds and thunderstorms, the frights I got bristled up my hair so that it’s never laid down since.”

“The first time I rode through the pass,” said Timothy, “I thought I had come to the Delectable



Mountains. It was a summer morning. I rode on and on in a kind of a dream till suddenly I came to a gibbet with a dead man swinging upon it. It distressed me." The little silver-headed man looked as though the memory of it still distressed him. "For the rest of my journey, I meditated upon our nature and the divine justice that is above our justice, for it sees with the eyes of mercy."

"I know who he was," said Red Geordie. "You can spare your sympathy for him, master. He murdered his wife and flung her body into Quaking Hag, and that minds me, by the by, I saw the last time I passed that Devil's pot that the fence is broken."

The good wife busied herself about preparing a meal. She made the fire burn brighter, and put the kettle on to boil ; all the time she talked.

"They say he walks round Quaking Hag at nights, carrying a light to lead witless folk into the peat holes. If the fence is down I wonder you let your horses go on their lone. They might wander from the track and you'd never see them no more."

"Oh," laughed the man, "Black Geordie kens the road as well as me. With a Black Geordie in front, and a Red Geordie behind, it's not many spooks will trouble us. I'll go and whisper a word in the old fellow's lug, and send him on. He'll be past the Hag before I catch him up. He should have been a general in the army—that old fellow—for he comes clean out o' all messes."

He went to the door, and soon there was the sound of hoofs upon the road. Joel saw the string of beasts disappear into the mist as they went on up the pass. Their master came back to the kitchen, and with him entered Peter Fleming.



“Another glass, mistress,” cried Red Geordie. “One for each of us ; glasses all round ; a stirrup cup for me, and a happy union for you. Your health, Master Joel Hart ! and schoolmaster Peter, here’s to you !”

At Peter’s entrance Joel’s haughtiness vanished, and with it went the white whisht-look that had caused the dame anxiety. His eyes began to burn, and his lips twitched. Colour mounted to his brow, and concentrated into two red patches upon his cheekbones. He got up from his seat, in the furthest corner of the ingle-nook, and moved nearer to Peter, looking at him with a gaze that roused suspicions in Red Geordie’s mind.

He thought of the rumours that were flying about, concerning these two men. Rumours were never to be relied upon—twenty years following the pack-horses had shown him their inconsequence. He had an intimate knowledge of the manner in which they grew, as they rolled from village to village, himself being an active agent in starting them upon their mad careers.

He watched Joel intently, and scrubbed his up-standing whiskers with a rasping sound. Peter might not know it, but hate was the fire that glittered in Hart’s eyes, hate was the colour that painted his wan cheeks, hate made his lips twitch, and drew him from his corner to the other end of the bench, for like love it finds satisfaction in being near the object of its passion.

“Good Lord !” he said to himself. “Here’s enough gunpowder to blow us all up.”

Then he turned to Peter.

“And how’s your bonny wife, schoolmaster ?” said he. “You should have brought her with you to



make a little sunshine in the Girdlestone, such a dim, dark day as this is ! A bonny face is always a bonny face, and worth looking at, even when it does belong to another man."

Joel scowled.

"When Fleming's here I want no bonny faces," he replied. "Peter's a good friend, and an old one. We're the best of friends, even though we did wrestle in such a manner that it brought me to death's door. But we'll have another wrestling yet, eh ? Come, we'll drink to the next wrestling. Mistress, wine, and the best you've got."

"I'm glad to see you in such good spirits," said Peter kindly, but he thought that Joel had already had more wine than was good for him.

"Spirits ! Yes, I'm looking forward to the next time we try a fall together."

"I've given up wrestling," said Peter.

"Man, will you not try another fall with me ?"

"No. I'm going to let my muscles run to fat—as the good folk predict. You gave me such a taste of it at the Shepherds' Meet, that my appetite is satisfied for ever."

"Satisfied, no ! You'll not be able to stand still, when you see other men in the ring. Besides we haven't finished the bout. You didn't throw me, you know. We'll finish it some fine day when I go back to Forest Hall."

"Let me ken the hour," said Red Geordie, picking up his whip, "I'll come and umpire. Hoo ! but I'd like fine to see the end o' that wrestling. Well, I must be off or Black Geordie will bring the whole lot back to look for me. Good bye, to you Master Hart. Good-bye, Peter Fleming. A word with you, Master Timothy."

The old man accompanied Red Geordie to the door.

"He's mad," said the pack-master, indicating the kitchen with his whip.

The kind old face looked distressed.

"A hint in your ear, master," and the man bent down and whispered, "murder."

"No, no, you're mistaken. He's just excited and has been drinking too much."

"It's murder ! I saw it in his face. If Schoolmaster Peter is a wise man he'll go schoolmastering to another place, and take his wife with him."

Red Geordie mounted his horse, and rode off saying :

"I ken what's what in the man's face. I don't ride the pack roads for nowt, master."



## CHAPTER XX

### THE SPELL OF THUNDERGAY

THE winter was one of storms. They rose suddenly towards evening, and continued intermittently throughout the night, with long, strange pauses between each, until the dawn of the next morning, when the sun got up amid bars of yellow and purple cloud. But the glory of sunrise was brief. The days were cold, short, and grey, and when darkness fell the wind howled as though nature were in a fury bordering upon madness. The silences, too, which fell so suddenly, when the storm was at its highest, seemed to indicate periods of exhaustion, like those which follow upon the unbridled passions of human beings.

In the bleak and solitary dale, where the farm of Greystones stood, there was little light till noon, for the mountain-wall surrounding it, kept out the rays of the sun; and Thundergay, at its head, poured a current of raw air into the hollow filling it with mist, through which the wild geese called mournfully, and the sheep wandered, too depressed to bleat, but seeking always for sustenance among the loose rocks and beds of scree. Once a day their scanty meal was supplemented by a feast of holly twigs which Barbara or the hind cut for them. They knew the time by instinct, and, half an hour before, might be seen travelling along the dale from all directions, and gathering round the thicket where the hollies grew.



This winter Mistress Annas Lynn began to feel the cold, and another woollen rug was put on the bed. She spent most of the day in keeping herself warm, and her usual occupation of knitting ceased. She did not sleep much, and often Barbara would tip-toe to the bedside to see if her great-grandmother were awake, and would find the bright eyes open, and raised to her face in an instant, with a keen searching look. But she spoke little, and appeared to find plenty of interest in her own thoughts. Strange thoughts they must have been, which passed through a mind so strong, individual, and so old.

But at night when the door was shut, the curtains drawn, the fire bright, she would sit up in bed and talk of the days long past, and times that were rude, but full of a spirit that kept the brain alive and made the flesh glow.

When she was young, men and women lived upon the strong meat of exertion and adventure. She said that they were giants compared to their sons and daughters, who could not digest anything more solid than pap. The old woman had a great contempt for the rising generation that she saw around her. She flung many a gibe at them, when they gathered in the kitchen, as they sometimes did of a winter evening, to hear her recount stories that made their hair stand on end and their flesh creep.

But in the midst of her quips and quiddities, she would sometimes break off to talk of Barbara. As her own energies began to fail, she drew vitality from the robust nature of her great-granddaughter. The girl was true kin to the strenuous souls of old. She had in her veins the blood of shepherd princes, her spirit was the spirit of kings—stern perhaps, silent



perhaps, but tempered as steel, unflinching before lightning flash, or whirlwind, ready as her forefathers had been to face the moss-troopers should they ever come again to rob the sheep-fold. But Barbara was born three generations too late. She was like an eagle with clipped wings, and had never a chance to show the mettle of her make.

Sometimes Barbara was present at these story-tellings. She would sit with her cheek resting on her hand, watching the flames, and seeing in them pictures which her great-grandmother's words painted. She, too, often longed for a life of adventure. Now that she had cut herself off from her books and intercourse with Peter—she saw him as little as was compatible with their relationship—now that she had clipped her own wings, she found life stale, lacking in all enterprise and interest.

She would not allow herself to meditate upon the past. She swept her mind clear of it, no regrets, no longings, no phantoms or shadows must find a lodging there. But an individuality such as hers could not become thus permanently dwarfed. She might clip her own wings, but they would grow again, and bear her upwards to cleave other air, and find other climes than those to which she had been borne away in the past.

Through the grey winter days and the wild winter nights, she flung a part of herself to the winds, and as it fluttered upon the blast like an autumn leaf, she thought of the trees in Cringel Forest, and pitied their nakedness. But they would grow green again, and spread their glory to the summer. So, perhaps for her, there would come a renewal, and her soul would blossom like the may—nay—not like the may,



sweet and beautiful as it was, but like the corn of wheat, which unless it fall into the ground and die, cannot bring forth fruit. She felt compassionate towards the wheat which went so patiently into the tomb, and came forth, like a shriven almoner of old, to give itself without reserve to the service of others.

Often when the wind shrieked about the old house, and the sycamores groaned under the lash, Mistress Lynn would listen with eager ears for the sound of Barbara's footsteps on the threshold. She knew by instinct, and understood by experience, that her great-granddaughter was going through some travail of soul. But she said nothing, only watched and waited, noting with her keen old brain the change of Barbara from a dreamy girl to a woman, whose will was becoming fixed in an inflexible mould, and whose mind was changing to something more mature but less comprehensible. As the winter deepened, the change grew more marked. Often in the pauses of the storm Barbara would enter with a slight smile, and a look as though she had been talking with someone, and was still full of that which she had heard.

"Where hast been?" the old woman would ask her.

"At Ketel's Parlour."

"Alone?"

Barbara laughed, and there was a new inflection in her voice.

"I'm never alone. I have the sheep and the heather and the birds. Besides, there's Thundergay. Thundergay is father and brother and sister and lover all in one. You know that great-granny. You sent me to Thundergay when I was only a bairn, and you said he'd teach me the way we Lynns must walk in the



world. Thundergay has opened his heart to me, and I'm never lonely with him."

At other times, in the midst of the battering of the wind, the girl would come in, her eyes shining, and her hair in wild disorder. She would go about her work with an energy never seen before in her movements. The hinds and Jess looked afraid of her, and kept their eyes fixed on their work.

Lucy was surprised, she wondered what had come over her sister. But the old woman said never a word to enlighten her. She was seeing, as it were, a picture of herself eighty years ago. Lucy did not often get speech with her sister at this time. Since the night at Ketel's Parlour, when she had gone back to the mill-house instead of fulfilling her plan of going to see Joel at the Shepherd's Rest, they had never opened their lips upon the subject. Lucy felt aggrieved, though why she hardly knew. She had expected to have Barbara's constant sympathy, after she had bent to her wishes; she had relied upon having a strong arm to uphold her in the path in which she had agreed to walk. Instead she was left to herself: she had to pick her own way without encouragement and without pity for her sufferings.

She thought Barbara cold and without understanding. Lucy was miserable. She was miserable because she was half-hearted; she still hankered after forbidden things, instead of turning away from them, and determining to draw out of her duty sustenance to enable her to fulfil it.

Peter, too, seemed to be preoccupied and weary. He was smitten by the blight of failure, by remorse, and stirred to a most righteous anger. "You have cast an Evil Eye on Barbara," said his self-condemning



spirit. Reason murmured against the assertion ; conscious of his integrity he would not be condemned unheard. Fate had laid a snare, covering it with pleasant things, so that he had stepped in without warning. " You sat down in the Siege Perilous, who were not strong enough to fill it," said the same condemning self, " and now you are learning what the consequences are."

But Peter saw one thing clearly and it was this : he must go away, and take Lucy with him. He dared not leave her behind ; for he was under no misconception about the attitude of Joel towards himself or his wife. Then, amid other scenes, he would beg her to help him, as he would help her, to bring order and happiness out of the disorder of their lives. Barbara he could not aid, save by going away.

Barbara was working out her own salvation. As in all severe discipline of either body or soul, some of the grace of her nature was sacrificed to the attainment of strength. A stern light began to shine in the soft eyes, and made their expression difficult to fathom. Folk with mean spirits could no longer sustain their gaze with equanimity. She was not so silent as she used to be, but her words were more enigmatical, and seemed to spring from a current of thought flowing deeper than ordinary mortals could probe. Like an underground river, it passed through scenes of wonder and mystery that would have astonished them beyond measure could they have followed its course.

Barbara had diverted the flow of her passion for Peter out of the usual channels in which such feelings run. Had she been free to love him in the way that men and women are meant to love, she would have become the most devoted of creatures, excelling others



by a greater degree of intensity in her affection, and not by an unique difference in its nature. As a wife and mother she would have been calm, self-sacrificing, supremely happy, viewing the larger world with a placid generosity, the overflow of her own abundance.

But in this direction her love could not flow. And as a subverted river will change the face of the country through which it runs, so her nature was changed.

She loved Peter still, not passionately, but none the less strongly ; not despairingly, for she hoped for nothing ; not with reservation, for no human barrier blocked the way ; neither sorrowfully, nor ashamed. All that can be said is that she loved him as a human being, who has shaken off the flesh and all its bonds, might love one who is still under its dominion.

The intensity of her love quickened the manifold energies of her nature. As a wife and mother she would have awakened to a realization of the riches of life's common things. Now that she must turn away from so well-trodden a path, she came into a world none the less real, none the less stirring with forces both spiritual and material, though undemonstrated to the ordinary mind and eye of man.

Life is seen through many windows. As time passes new ones are opened, and old ones blocked up, sometimes by our own hands, often by the hands of others. Barbara had deliberately shuttered one of her windows when she burnt her books ; but now a new one was to be opened for her. The revelation came suddenly. The mountain Thundergay, the beloved nurse of her youth, and her well-tried companion, drew back the curtains, and she looked out, at first with blinking eyelids as though unaccustomed to the strange light.



What did she see? A wonderful world, a land of mystery, a country inhabited by immortals.

Nature was no longer dumb. It spoke to her in a language that she could understand. It took the place of her books, and human friends; it came into the circle of her love—that love which surrounded Peter with so white a light, and emanated from her in never dimming radiance.

She felt herself to be a part of a great order. There was a bond between the golden clouds of dawn and herself, between the winds and her. She had a common bond, too, with all living things, sheep, birds, and also the foxes and the ravens. All were in their place, and she was in her place. This gave to her life a sense of repose.

But such a sense of security alone could not have built up the character of Barbara Lynn. Mere freedom from fear is a negative quality, unless the emancipated soul makes use of its privileges to flow out in search of worthier objects to stimulate its energies.

Had Barbara been placed in the midst of a crowded city, to humanity she would have turned and would have spent her life in its service. But none required her at High Fold: there was no one upon whom she could bestow the riches of her nature save her great-grandmother, who desired and asked for little. So to Thundergay she turned, to its dales and steepes, its fountains and ravines. She drew inspiration to be strong from its strength, and power to suffer from its endurance. She subjected her body to severe discipline so that no crag defied her, while cold and discomfort counted for nought.

Only by such physical and mental training could she



steel herself to bear her sorrow without flagging steps. Some day a command might come to her to climb higher, and she desired to be ready, prepared in her threefold nature of body, soul, and spirit.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE CALL

“GOOD-BYE, Lucy,” said Peter. He was standing at the mill-house door, while a man held his horse at the gate. “I wish you hadn’t changed your mind,” he continued, “and were coming with me. I thought that we were going to have a jolly time together. Won’t you come? Are you sure you don’t care to come? There’s still time.”

It was early morning, although darkness and night vapours hung among the trees on the other side of the beck, and the village had not yet awakened to the day’s work. Lucy listened to the rushing of the water and shivered.

“How like a man,” she exclaimed. “Still time when your horse is ready saddled, and I haven’t even a petticoat packed. No, no, I’d rather stay at home, thank you. But I hope you’ll have a pleasant journey.”

“I’m awfully loath to leave you,” he said.

“Why? I shall not run away. I’ll be waiting for you on the doorstep when you come home, ever so pleased to see you. They say absence makes the heart grow fonder, you know. There, don’t look so gloomy. You make me wish I’d never said I’d go with you; for then you wouldn’t have been disappointed.”

“If you’d only say yes now, Lucy, you could make shift to do without the petticoats. I’d buy you new



ones when we got to London. Put on your bonnet and cloak, there's a bonny wife, and come away."

"Are you afraid I'll vanish?"

"I've never left you alone before. I don't like leaving you here. The mill-house is a dreary place when you've nothing to listen to but the sound of running water. Will you go up to Greystones?"

"And be scolded all day long by great-granny! Well, if it will set your mind at rest I'll go. But don't worry about me."

He was silent for a moment.

"Good-bye, Peter," said Lucy, "it's too cold to stand here any longer. Good-bye."

He hesitated, seemed as though he would say something more, then turned to go down the path, but she called him back.

"Here, lad," she said, "give me another kiss. Don't stay away too long; I'll be counting the days till you come back."

When he had ridden off, in spite of her assertion that it was too cold to stand on the doorstep, she did not enter the house at once, but stood staring along the dark village street down which he had disappeared. Her eyes seemed to entreat him to return, but she controlled her impulse to call him back. Again she shivered. The sense of protection which her husband's presence always gave her, was withdrawn. Yet what had she to fear? The sound of the rushing beck was melancholy.

She withdrew hastily and shut the door. A bright fire was burning in the parlour, and the remains of breakfast lay on the table. She sat down in Peter's chair, and looked at a little heap of bread which his restless fingers had crumbled. She knew that he



would not have left her just now if he could have helped it, and she guessed the reason. A flush mounted to her brow as she thought that he did not trust her, his wife. He need have no qualms. She had only seen Joel Hart once since his return ; she had had nothing to do with the fierce wrestling at the Shepherds' Meet. Since then she had walked as prudently as any demure matron could do. What could he suspect ? What right had he to suspect anything ? Yet the knowledge that he did not trust her stung.

She wished, now, that she had gone with him as she had at first promised. Why had she not gone ? She had tried to persuade herself that she could not endure the long ride over the pack-horse track ; then the cold, uncomfortable journey in a crowded coach ; and lastly a strange lodging in a strange city where she knew no one. If it had been the summer time she would not have hesitated for a moment. She had wanted all her life to see London—the Tower, St. James's, Westminster. Peter had promised to take her, but something had always come in the way to prevent him. It was too aggravating that he should have chosen this time to go, when the snow might fall any day, making travelling not only disagreeable but dangerous.

A week ago, Peter had told her that the friend, who had offered him the post in India, had written about an opening in London ; and that if he thought it would suit him, he must come up at once to meet certain influential gentlemen who were deliberating upon it.

Lucy had shilly-shallied, saying first that she would go too, then that she would not go, and again that she would. The reason which lay at the back of her indecision was the hope of meeting Joel. She had



heard that he meant to go away as soon as he was well enough, and she wanted, at least, to bid him good-bye.

For some unaccountable reason, she now felt afraid, and would have given—what would she not have given?—to hear the sound of hoofs in the street and then her husband's voice at the door. The room was still full of the impression of his presence, though he had gone. His slippers by the fire; his book on the sill, with the marker in it which she had worked for him before they were married; the bright walls; the cushions and hangings, the pictures—all the pretty things with which he had surrounded her, rose up like witnesses to plead for him and condemn her.

How she wished that Joel had not written the letter which had upset her peace of mind! She wished that he had never come back to Forest Hall, looking handsomer than ever. Peter and she might then have found happiness. She thought, when she married him, that she loved him truly. So she did, but she did not love him best. Why could she not love him best?

If Joel were to call her now would she spring to meet him, and claim him as her soul's true mate? A numbness crept over her. Was it of this she felt apprehensive—the coming of a call—and that she would not be strong enough to resist?

She longed for her husband's return, yet she feared him. She was afraid of Joel, yet she loved him. She wondered whether there was another woman in the world in such sore straits as she.

Tears did not relieve her; they only spoiled the colour of her cheeks, made her eyes red, and her head ache. So she dried them and looked up. Daylight



was streaming through the window and turning the lamp's flame to a sickly yellow hue that paled and dwindled, like the changeling children who are said to dwindle in the cradle when morning dawns. There was something so unpleasant and unwholesome in its light that Lucy rose and turned it out. Then she called the servant-lass to come and clear away the breakfast dishes.

She wandered in and out from parlour to kitchen, and kitchen to parlour. She lifted up first this thing, then that; started to mend her frills, but pricked her finger and tossed the work aside; took up a book but dropped it listlessly; sat first in one chair, then in another; and at last sank down on a three-legged stool before the hearth.

The hours dragged. She glanced out, but the prospect was not inviting. Bare and brown stood the trees; the beck rushed along as brown as they; the road in Cringel Forest would be inches deep in mud; not a bird chirruped. She wondered if she should go up to Greystones. She had promised Peter that she would go, yet why should she? She liked her own home best. She preferred its present dreariness to her great-grandmother's tongue. Besides, up there, every movement would be watched and criticised. And she might—she did not think it likely—still she might want to go out without being asked where she was going.

This was the day that the Need Fire was to be lit in Boar Dale. Lucy had no wish to come into the midst of a bellowing herd of cattle, so she found in it another reason for deferring her visit.

Towards noon a lad knocked at the door and left a small package for her. She untied it with trembling



fingers, for she knew that it was from Joel. Out of it fell a little lump of gold, and a note asking her for the sake of old times to come over the Robber's Rake to see him. He gave no reasons, but she was not surprised. He had been ill ; he was not yet well enough to return to Forest Hall, and he had been longing to see her, as she to see him. Perhaps he knew that Peter was away, and that it would be easier for them to meet now than ever again.

She dropped the gold and the scrap of paper as though they had been red-hot cinders, and stood looking at them as if she expected them to speak. And they did speak. No tongue could have been more eloquent than that little bit of metal, no voice more full of entreaty than the scrawled characters of Joel's handwriting. They were urgent. With them she could not expostulate, excuse herself, or maintain a virtuous reserve.

Her dead hopes, dreams, promises came again to life and seemed to stand about her, looking into her face with blinkless eyes. They entreated her, for old sake's sake, to grant his wish.

She knit her brows in perplexity. Should she go ? Would it be wise to go ? Why should she not go ? Wherein lay the unwisdom ? She wanted to see Joel for the last time, to tell him that they must never meet again ; that he must forget her, as she would endeavour to forget him. He need not leave High Fold in order to escape her ; for she and Peter were going away ; but he must not follow or attempt to renew their friendship. So plausible, so self-controlled, so wise appeared her reasons to her own mind that she could find no serious objection to complying with his request.



She forgot, or would not allow herself to remember, that this was the call which she had feared. But a thing far off looks so different to the same thing at hand that she did not recognize them as one and the same.

Musing thus, and undecided still, with her eyes flitting about the room as though in fear of seeing something which would turn her from the purpose she wanted to form, it seemed to her that she saw the grey-clad figures of the miller and his wife come in at the door and sit down in their vacant chairs. They did not look at her, they were but shadows, but Lucy fled. She was afraid of Peter's dead father and mother. They had loved him so, his honour was their honour, and they had died heart-broken thinking her unworthy to be his wife. She had bitterly resented their reproachful eyes, she bitterly resented that they should cross her vision now, as though they had come to guard their son's good name when he was away.

Lucy put on her cloak and went out.

In order to escape any undesirable questions or inquisitive eyes she did not follow the road through the forest, but took one of the innumerable paths that led along the fells, opposite to Greystones, on the other side of the beck.

Heavy clouds, that were purple underneath, but stained with a murky brown along their upper edges, lay motionless upon the higher hills, levelling their rugged peaks as with a knife. No gleam of sunlight or patch of blue lit the savage landscape. It was made of iron and bronze, a hard menacing corner of the world, whose scars and gashes, dealt by an earlier age, kindly Time had not yet managed to rub



out or smooth into pleasant lines. The weather had been fine for several days, and a high wind had dried the dead bracken and bent grass, but there was every appearance of coming rain.

From a field in the bottom of the dale, near Grey-stones, smoke was rolling as though a subterranean fire had broken through the earth's crust, and begun to belch forth its pent up energies in fountains of acrid vapour. Now and then a red tongue leaped among it, only to be smothered by a denser cloud.

The Need Fire\* was an ancient institution to which the dalesfolk had formerly resorted in times of disaster. All the household fires were extinguished, and it was lit by rubbing together two pieces of wood, which had never been inside a human habitation. Peter had smiled when he had heard that it was to be lighted in Boar Dale, and passed on from farm to farm through that district. But Timothy Hadwin believed in it, and Barbara was strongly in its favour.

Lucy looked down as she hurried along.

A loud bellowing and bleating rose from the field. Little could be seen for the drifting smoke, but she thought of Barbara in the midst of it, helping to drive through the cattle, blackened—she did not doubt—by the fire, bleary-eyed, probably, with its stinging vapour, but in her proper element. Barbara had been born into her true sphere—the bleak mountains, the grey crags, the eagle, beating its wings as it were against the overhanging clouds, were her fitting companions. But she, Lucy, had never been at her ease with them. She had always felt forlorn

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\* The last "Need Fire" was set going near Kendal in 1840. At Crosthwaite its "smoke" was in the Kirk Lane on Sunday, November 15th of that year.



in this land of the dales and fells. It was not her spirit's country, although her native land. Perhaps London would be more to her mind.

She had not gone far when her thoughts came back with a start to the object of her journey over the fells. The colour left her face and her eyes were filled with alarm. The temporary wandering of her mind, though it had only been for a moment, had again unsettled her. She hesitated, wondered whether to go or return. Her heart was tossed about like drift-weed upon unquiet waters. She felt that she was out upon a stormy sea. If she retreated, would she regret her action when she got back again into the safe harbour? She was afraid to go on, for she did not know with what sunken perils the way was strewn.

She came to the end of the sheep-track, where it joined the Robber's Rake on the far side of the tarn from Ketel's Parlour. She halted by a post that pointed the way, when the ground lay covered with snow. She looked up and down. Just as the sign-post pointed in two directions, so her mind was drawn in two directions. To go one way was right, to go the other wrong. But which was right and which wrong? First she decided this, then that, but as hastily reversed her ideas again. She arranged them to suit her wishes, or her sense of justice, or expediency. She could not decide.

She walked on a little further.

Then she saw a figure rise up from a rock upon which it had been sitting, and come to meet her. It was Joel.



## CHAPTER XXII

### THE TRYST AT GIRDLESTONE PASS

“SHALL we go to the Shepherd’s Rest?” Lucy timidly suggested.

Joel would not hear of it. The good-wife was in the house, he said, and she had a tongue for babbling that would challenge any mountain beck. But in that wild and rock-strewn pass was many a sheltered nook, where two people could meet unnoticed, and undisturbed, save by wandering sheep or screaming curlews. He guided Lucy to the stone, which gave its name to the place, and there they sat down.

A more secluded spot they could not have found. It was wild beyond expression. Before them the fell-side shelved away, strewn with slatey scree, at the foot of which a stream tumbled, and sent its thunders reverberating along the pass. The pack-horse track marched with the stream in the direction of the inn, which stood below them to the left, hidden by the unevenness of the ground. To the right the road still went on up a steep ascent, then, dipping over a brow, ran through low and marshy moorland for many miles, until it reached the great North Road. In the midst of this boggy part lay Quaking Hag. Overhead was poised the girdle stone, a massive fragment fallen from the crags above, and supported by rocks, that the storms of centuries had rough-hewn into the shape of pillars. Underneath it the ground was dry

and sheltered from the raw air. Behind rose the mountain Thundergay, as rugged on this side as upon that which looked into Boar Dale.

Joel regarded Lucy with an intent gaze, and she stole many a glance at him. He was not as altered as she had expected to find him. Indeed, save for a restless light in his eyes, lines about his mouth, and the pallor of his face there was little change to be seen. She wondered why he had not returned to Forest Hall; for he had recovered from his illness sufficiently to have walked the few miles between the Shepherd's Rest and High Fold.

"So you've come to see me at last, Lucy," he said, fondling her fingers and looking into her face.

"Did you expect me before?" she asked, wishing to withdraw her hand from his, yet not liking to do so for fear it would seem unkind.

"No, but I wondered if you would manage to give Peter the slip some day, and get away. I used to buoy myself up through the long nights when I couldn't sleep, with the hope of hearing your voice in the morning."

"I'm sorry you have been so ill, Joel."

"Don't be sorry, Lucy, at least don't cry, for it clouds your eyes, which are just like two bits of blue sky, and there's not much blue sky to be seen to-day. Do you know, my dear, when I lay sick in the inn yonder, I often comforted myself by thinking that you were sitting by the bedside, hidden behind the curtains, and that I could, if I liked, pull them back and look at you. Fortunately I had sense enough not to try the experiment. So I got the pleasure without the disappointment."

"I wanted to come," she began hurriedly, "I



would have come, but Barbara wouldn't let me. I longed and longed and longed——”

She broke off abruptly for his glance disturbed her. What was the meaning of the light in his eyes? She had seen them grow radiant in the past as lamps lit by some inner fire, but never seen them shine as now, so fierce and glowing that they frightened her. She cast a look in the direction of the Shepherd's Rest.

“Isn't it too cold for you out here?” she said. “I don't mind being seen by the woman at the inn. We are doing nothing we need hide. It is quite natural that I should come to see how you are when Peter is away.”

“Is it?” he asked with a strange laugh. “I doubt if the good-wife would think so.”

“Well, if it isn't,” she replied, colouring and feeling more and more reluctant to stay alone with him, “I'd better go home.”

He controlled his feelings, whatever they were, and laid a detaining hand upon her arm.

“Let's talk calmly like two sensible folk,” he said.

“I'm sure you oughtn't to be out. Don't forget how ill you've been, and that this isn't a summer's day.”

“It's been a summer's day since you came, Lucy. But sit down. I haven't spent five years in a land covered with snow for half the time without becoming inured to some discomfort. Be good and kind. I've seen so little of you, and thought so much that you shouldn't grudge me this bit of pleasure.”

She sat down again, drawing her cloak closer about her. She thought that the Girdlestone was not a fitting spot to talk with a man who had once been



her lover. She was perplexed at his manner. She felt instinctively that a change had taken place in him. She could not have defined it ; but the deterioration which had been going on in his character for the last few weeks showed through his words and actions, though they were as affectionate as they had always been.

For some moments he leaned back against the rock, letting his eyes rove over her face.

“ I’ve carried your picture here,” he said, tapping his breast, “ all the years I’ve been away ; I’m now comparing it with the original.”

“ Well,” she inquired at last, “ am I like it or have I changed ? ”

“ The same, the same, yet not the same. There’s a firmer line about your mouth than you could draw round it in the old days.”

“ Age should bring wisdom, should it not ? ” She sighed and then continued. “ But I’m afraid I don’t learn and grow wise.”

“ I know who put that line there,” he said sharply. She looked up, surprised.

“ It was Barbara, Barbara, damn her, the night she prevented you coming to see me.”

She winced and rose to her feet. He saw that he had made a mistake, and drew her gently to his side.

“ Oh, Lucy, Lucy,” he cried suddenly, “ I’m beside myself. I can’t live without you any longer. I’m mad I know ; but I want you, I want you as a man never wanted a woman before. We were born for each other, you can’t deny it. Come away with me. We’ll go and make happiness for ourselves in a corner of the earth, where no one will ever seek us.”



He put his arms round her, and she only half resisted, though she said :

“ But, oh, Joel, you forget that I’m another man’s wife.”

“ I don’t forget it. The fact’s there ; but we’ll disregard it. We’ll go away, now, at once. . . .”

She tore herself suddenly from him as though his embrace stung her. “ What am I doing ? What are you saying ? Oh, Joel, we cannot. . . .”

It was not till then that she realised her position. She loved this man, and, though she had married Peter Fleming, his image had floated before her mind through all the years of his absence, and she had often regretted that she had not waited for him. His return had excited her ; she liked his admiration and his caresses, and, at their last meeting, she had let her feelings have their way. She had been full of thoughts of that which might have been. But she had never intended being seriously disloyal to her husband. She had come to see Joel, so she told herself, merely to bid him good-bye ; to tell him that they must not meet again ; and to say that she hoped he would be happy. Now she was aghast at the place where her actions had brought her. Go off with Joel ? She could not dream of such a thing ! He was an honourable man, only over-wrought by his love for her. He could never really think of taking her away.

“ Be brave, Lucy,” he said.

“ I must leave you. We must part.”

“ Be true to yourself, Lucy.”

“ I should loathe myself if I did as you asked.”

“ You love me, my dear.”

“ But I’m Peter’s wife.”

“ Peter can get another, and you shall have me for a husband.”

“ It can’t be, Joel. We must say good-bye. I only came to say good-bye.”

“ We’ll both say good-bye—to High Fold and Boar Dale—we’ll say it together, and go away.”

She drew back to the furthest corner of their retreat, and stared at him.

“ Do you know what you are asking me to do ? ” she said, scarcely above a whisper.

“ I’ve thought it all out ; I’ve planned it.”

“ But I cannot go away with you.”

“ You love me,” he repeated triumphantly.

“ I did once,” she cried, “ but I’m afraid of you now. Peter would never ask a woman to do what you are asking me, no matter how much he cared for her.”

Joel moved to the entrance, and stood with his back to her for a moment. The clouds were darker, the fellside more stern, the foam of the beck whiter in the waning light. But the out-look was not so wild as the picture which he saw within himself, when he turned the eye of his mind upon it.

Man never grasps the significance of his own thoughts. They cross and recross, and deal with each other often apart from his direct consciousness, and that which he has to accept is their conclusion.

Hope and despair, hate and honour—all these had filled Joel’s brain, had joined forces or fought—as the case might be—and now he saw it strewn with the remains of war, where one figure stalked, and its name was hate. Then a faint light glimmered down, and he was aware of the star of love still shining



overhead. There was commotion in his mind. Hate menaced the star but could not put it out.

Turning to Lucy, he said :

“ Must it be good-bye ? ”

Her lips quivered and she nodded.

“ It’s a little word,” he replied, “ and very ill to say. I’ll not say it. If you go . . . but you’ll not go. Think of me, Lucy. Give a thought to the loneliness of my life. Remember how I worked to get rich for your sake. That bit of gold—have you got it ? ” She made a movement of assent. “ We’ll still have it made into a ring, and you shall wear it. You’re mine in heart. Why should you be afraid to trust yourself to me ? I’ll take care of you, Lucy. You shall be happy, you shall be rich. You shall have everything you want, if you’ll only put yourself into my keeping.”

“ You might give me all these things,” she whispered, “ but you don’t understand, Joel. I should have the mind of a . . . I should be like a toad. Barbara said so.”

“ I knew it was Barbara, who had changed your feelings towards me,” he bitterly replied.

“ I do think of you,” she said, “ I know you will be sad and lonely. So shall I be. You do not think of me, Joel.”

He looked moodily through the gathering gloom.

“ The day is nearly over,” he muttered, “ and we have made little use of it. For days I’ve been wanting to see you, wondering how I could bring you to the Girdlestone. Now you bid us part, and forever. Well, let us go. The sooner good-bye is said the better . . . if it must be said.”

They went down the brae to the stream, which



they crossed by a bridge. The long, withered branches of a wild rose draggled in the rushing water, catching hold of the flotsam that the swift current brought down, and tangling it into a mat of twigs, leaves and sheepswool.

The roar of the beck seemed to give Lucy confidence. She wiped her tears, tried to smile bravely into the gloomy face of the man by her side, and gently touched his arm.

“You’ll find someone much handsomer and better than me, Joel, to be your wife.”

He shrugged his shoulders, and made no reply.

“I’ve been like yon briar,” she said in an undertone, “letting myself draggle in a torrent, and holding on to all the regrets and disappointments it’s brought me. But now I’ll shake them off. From to-day, this hour, I’ll lift myself up and hope that a green and blooming time will come for you as well as me.”

“A green and blooming time will surely come,” he replied quickly. “It’s coming now. I can’t let you go, Lucy. It’s no use pretending that I mean to let you go. We must twine together. . . .” His looks began to get wild and his voice shook as though he were losing control of himself again. “You know the song :

‘ Out of her bosom there grew a red rose  
And out of her lover’s a briar, a briar. . . .’

But I’m talking nonsense, and frightening you.”

A scared look came into her eyes. The afternoon was darkening, and it was high time that she should be getting home, if she did not want to be benighted upon the fells. She might lose her way unless she reached the Robber’s Rake before dusk.



“Good-bye, Joel,” she said, her voice trembling, not only with the emotion that the words called up—for she knew that whatever more was said, good-bye must be the last word uttered between them—but she was startled by the fierce face turned upon her.

“I told you we could not say it,” he muttered.

“But we must: we can’t do anything else.”

“Speak the truth, Lucy, do you love Peter or me best?” He took her by the shoulders, so that she must face him. “I loved you first,” he cried, “long before he did. You promised yourself to me. He has no right to you.”

Joel’s pent up hatred burst forth. It flowed from his lips like a venomous flood upon the shrinking head of the woman. Deeper than his love for her, so it seemed, ran his hate.

“Let me go,” said Lucy, “you don’t know what you are saying.”

“Which of us do you love best?” he continued, taking no notice of her attempts to free herself. “If you say Peter, I’ll throw you into the beck—its deep enough to drown you. But you love me best. I know it, I’ve always known it. Be brave, be strong, Lucy. I’ve got a horse waiting just beyond the dip in the road to take us away. We’ll go away now, and before anyone can follow us we shall be on the seas.”

He drew her along the pack-horse track in the direction that he indicated.

She struggled to free herself. She felt all the love which she had for him ooze out of her. His attitude opened her eyes, and she realized, with renewed dread, in what a dangerous position she had placed herself. Her thoughts turned with a frantic rush towards her husband. Oh, if only his face would appear through



the gloom . . . . If only she could hear his kindly voice calling to her. . . . But Peter was far away by now on the road to London. She was alone. There was no one near, no one who could help her. Joel's handsome countenance was like a nightmare: his fond words, his embraces—the idea of ever having received such expressions of love from him became suddenly repulsive.

“Let me be, Joel,” she said, “or I'll call out.”

He did not heed her.

“Where shall we go, Lucy,” he said, “there's all the world to choose from?”

“Go where you like,” she replied, “only take your hand off my shoulder.”

She noticed that twilight was drawing swiftly down. In half an hour it would be night, and the clouds were already settling lower on the fells, so that the horrors of loneliness and darkness would be doubled by the bewildering presence of the mist. But she had not time to think just now of how she would get home. She must flee anywhere; she must escape from Joel, who was acting and speaking as though he had gone suddenly mad. Girdlestone Pass provided plenty of hiding places if she could only succeed in baffling him. She cast her eyes swiftly over the landscape. She must not take to the hillside—it was too steep and rough for her to hope to elude him there; she would betray herself by falling, if she did not come to a crag that she could not climb. The moorland on the left, with its brown hummocks, scrub, and mossy stones, would provide her with a surer means of escape. She never thought of Quaking Hag, she did not know where it lay, for she had rarely been in the pass before.

She wondered once if she should scream, but it was



unlikely that anyone would hear her. The Shepherd's Rest was too far off, and travellers rarely passed that way.

Every minute the dusk deepened, Joel had shifted his hand to her arm, when he found that she ceased to resist him. He was peering forward, trying to see the horse which he had tied to a tree so that it might be in readiness.

Then Lucy bent down, and set her teeth in his hand. He gave a sharp exclamation, loosened his grasp, and she fled from him into the shadows.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A PATHWAY OF FIRE

THE night was dark, no star shone, and, though the moon had risen, it could not penetrate the clouds, which hung over the sky, and rested on the mountain tops. There was just enough light to show how wild and lonely was the pack-horsetrack through Girdlestone Pass.

About nine o'clock Barbara came along it. She walked as a shepherd walks, who has many miles to travel, and must not grow weary. She did not hurry, neither did she dally nor halt, but kept up an even pace, regardless of the dips and rises in the road.

She was returning from a distant farm, whither she had carried the Need Fire, and where the good folk had waited all the afternoon, the cattle folded near the house, and a pile, like a haystack, of green wood ready to be lit, when the sacred element—for such they regarded it—should be brought from Boar Dale. They had given up all hope of receiving it that night, when, about seven o'clock, a loud knock came to the door, and Barbara Lynn stood there, with the smouldering embers in a cauldron.

Now she was returning, but not by the way she had come, over a shoulder of Thundergay, for there was no track to guide her, and the mist and darkness hid the familiar landmarks ; so she struck the road through Girdlestone Pass instead, meaning to reach Greystones by the round-about way of the Robber's Rake.



She kept with her still some of the exalted feeling, which had thrilled her, when she had carried the Need Fire over the mountains. In her own eyes she had been raised from her humble office of hewer of wood and drawer of water to the rank of a priestess.

No Druidess, administering the rites of her religion, could have had a greater sense of the mystery of life, and the debt it owed to symbolism to make it intelligible, than Barbara at this time. Her character, founded upon Christian principles, was yet bathed in a pagan glow of awe and wonderment. Natural forces drew forth her reverence. Fire, Wind and Water became personified: they bore an analogy to Life, Soul, and Spirit. And her love of the old Greek tales filled her imagination with so rich a store of treasure—much that was strange, fair and exalted in ancient thought—that she had an inexhaustible wealth to draw upon for her delight and nourishment.

She had watched Timothy Hadwin kindle the Need Fire with a keen sense of its inner significance. Fire was the symbol of purification and smoke the symbol of prayer. It seemed to her fitting that man should make this outward show of his repentance, for she believed—as most of the fell-folk did—that the pestilence threatening the cattle was the sign of an aggrieved heavenly power. When the Greeks sinned had not the god of the Silver Bow sent his deadly arrows hissing among them, killing first their dogs and mules, and then their men, until they heeded the warning and made their peace with sacrifices and restitution? For what transgression the black bane had been sent into the dales and fells Barbara did not ask. Was it a question worth asking, when no heart was pure?



Let every man amend his ways, and the appeal to heaven would not go up in vain.

Filled with some such thoughts as these, she threaded her lonely path through the dim land. Upon her body were still the marks of fire, her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were scorched, and her clothes were so well thurified, that they shook out a pungent odour of smoke at every movement. Neither weariness, nor pain—she had been on her feet since long before daybreak—could rob her figure of its lofty carriage.

The silence suited her mood ; and the darkness, blotting out the well known features of the landscape, allowed her brain to paint its own picture of the country through which she was journeying. She was, in fact, carried by her imagination far away from the Girdlestone. But no earthly land received her spiritual body. She had come to a place where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, having passed through the Need Fire which purifies from all dross. There she walked in a clear light, holding sweet fellowship with one from whom she must be forever separated on earth.

More and more of late Barbara had begun to fix her thoughts upon that which lay beyond mortal existence. Her life was empty : instincts, desires, hopes—the birthright of the human soul—were spilled like water upon the ground. She had nothing to expect here : but there—what glorious prospects opened out !

Timothy Hadwin often talked to her about the next world, and she had imbibed much of his philosophy, colouring it to satisfy her own desires. She believed in a Great Spirit. She believed that every living creature had a living soul. She believed that behind



every material thing there was a spiritual force. She believed that her desire for knowledge would, hereafter, be fulfilled. All that she knew from the outside now, would there be revealed in its inmost reality.

But it was not an immaterial world that her faith painted. Trees, streams, mountain gorge and starry peak made it beautiful. She loved the trees, their leaves pleased her eyes, their chiming her ears ; but when she became a spirit, she would enjoy their very life in a deeper sense ; for she would be able to pass into their being like the Hamadryads of Greece, only she would not die with the trees, for death would no longer exist. In the same way she would be able to become one with the streams, the dales and fells. But above all and beneath all—for it was both the foundation and summit of her hopes—human fellowship would then present no barriers to a perfect communion. She would need no eyes to see and recognize the loved one, no hands to draw his attention, no feet with which to come nigh him, no voice to tell him her thoughts. Spirit would pass into Spirit, would live and move and understand, without bodily aids, which are also the instruments of misunderstanding and separation.

She was wakened from her dream by hearing a voice speak from the wayside. Now that her attention was drawn to it, she could dimly make out a huddled figure, whose limbs seemed to melt and become one with the rock upon which it sat.

“ Angel or devil ! ” said a hoarse voice. “ Who are you ? ”

She came nearer and peered into the man’s face.

“ Why, Joel,” she exclaimed in surprise. “ I didn’t expect to see you here.”



He staggered to his feet and she felt sure that he had been drinking.

“It’s always the unexpected that happens,” he replied.

When Lucy had run away from him, he had been so overtaken by surprise, that for a few seconds he had not been able to grasp the reality of the fact. Then passion had swept away his senses, and he had rushed hither and thither like a mad man, calling, cursing, but seeing nothing, so swiftly had her grey-cloaked figure been swept up into the gathering darkness. His wild scheme of carrying her off defeated, and knowing that his desires and hopes could never now be realized, he had so far recovered himself as to lay hold of a shred of reason, and stifle his anger. He had taken the horse back to the inn, and then had sat down in his corner by the fire, silent and sullen, heedless of the dame’s chatter, and only wishful to be left alone. He had demanded wine, and had tried to drown his wrath and bitter sense of failure. But he could not endure the good-wife’s tongue, and at length had got up and gone out. He had told himself that he would go back to Forest Hall to-morrow, settle his affairs with all speed and never set foot in Boar Dale again. He was sick of the Shepherd’s Rest, and would not have stayed so long only the place had been convenient for his purpose. There he had hoped to decoy Lucy and take her away. In the light of their last meeting, he had felt sure that she would go with him.

And now, having walked aimlessly along the pack-horse track, the mist chilling him to the bone, he would have returned again to the inn, but that he was afraid of the inquisitive eyes of the woman there, who looked at him as though she were suspicious that some wild



adventure was in the air. He was not able to lash himself into his former fury, his heart seemed to be dead. The hand of the woman he loved had killed it. Even the thought of Peter did not rouse him. Hate, for the time being, was burning low.

In this mood he had come again to the spot where Lucy had fled from him. He had begun to wonder in which direction she had really gone. How was it that she had eluded him so quickly? He looked round him. Then there had been light enough to distinguish the nearer objects—a stunted thorn, the flash of the beck, the overhanging crags, but now all was undefined, and bleak. A little glitter, just beyond the left bank of the road, had caught his eye, and held him spell-bound. He had stared with growing understanding. On that side lay marshy ground, stretching away to the opposite fells, and yonder was Quaking Hag, shunned by all travellers, and forsaken of God. He had sunk on a stone, sobered by that which he saw, for the glittering mark was followed by another and yet another, until the misty nature of the night prevented further sight. They were the froth o' the marsh, a kind of putrified earth, which, when it has been trodden upon, shines like fire in the darkness.

He had just realised what the *igneum lutum* meant, when Barbara had come along the pass and he had accosted her.

“Barbara Lynn,” he muttered, a note of suspicion creeping into his voice. “What the devil are you doing here?”

“I’m going home.”

“Going home to Greystones! Have you seen Lucy?”



“No. Why do you ask?”

He did not reply for a moment, then said:

“Are you sure you haven’t passed her?”

Barbara’s blood began to quicken with vague doubts.

“Have you seen her?” she demanded. “Has my sister been here?”

“Yes, I sent for her.”

“And where is she now?”

“Gone home long ago.”

“Thank God.”

Barbara uttered the words with profound gratitude, then she turned sharply on the man. “You’re doing wrong, Joel. Neither you nor Lucy have any right to meet in this way.”

“It will never happen again,” he said.

She started uneasily. Into her mind crept a fear that all was not well. She tried to read his face: the night was too dark and his manner baffled her.

But he rose suddenly, took her roughly by the arm, and turning her round, pointed to the shining marks.

“Do you know what they are?” he cried.

“I’ve seen them before,” she said, “on such a night as this. They’re footprints. Someone has been crossing the marsh.” Horror crept over her, but before she could frame a question, he had jerked his hand in the direction of Quaking Hag.

“The fence is broken,” he said, “there are gaps in it. Does Lucy know the place?”

“What do you mean, Joel? What has happened? You said Lucy had gone home.”

“She ran away and left me. I don’t know where she went: I don’t know what’s become of her. No doubt she’s safe at home.”

Barbara uttered no cry, no word of anguish or



condemnation. She stood for a moment as though frozen, then turned to the man beside her.

“God forgive you! Some ill may have happened to Lucy! Go to the inn,” she said. “Go at once. Tell every one to follow me to Quaking Hag.”

He hesitated.

“Go,” she cried. “Why do you stand there as if you hadn’t heard? You’re sober enough to know what may have happened.”

“I’ll help you to look for her,” he doggedly replied.

“That’s as you please. But you’ll go to the inn first.”

There was such a note of authority in her voice that he had to obey. He dared not do otherwise.

Barbara left the road, and followed the glittering prints that led away over the marsh. As she got nearer to it, the will o’ the wisp shone here and there; the ground got softer, and she knew that slimy pools were opening out on every side. Now and again she called Lucy’s name, but there was no answer. Utter silence closed round her. She went on, not daring to hope that she might find a trace of her sister. Quaking Hag kept whatsoever it took, and told no secrets.

Her mind seemed to be stiff with horror. She could think of nothing save that she must go on, until she could go no further.

The footprints were Lucy’s. She had run, in her blind fear, some way across the mire before she became aware of its nature. Her one idea had been to escape from Joel, and, when she was safe, steer, by any landmarks she could recognize, for Thundergay. She would not dare seek the Robber’s Rake in case her pursuer laid in wait for her there. Now she realised that she was running in the direction



of Quaking Hag, and stricken with horror, she would have given expression to it in a call for help, had not dread of Joel's finding her, controlled her tongue.

She paused in her flight and listened. But she could only hear the breaking of bubbles at her feet. Bewildered by the twilight, and the unfamiliar place, she lost herself among a maze of peat-pots. With every step she sank deeper in the ground.

Then afraid to go this way or that she stood still. Should she call? No one would hear her but Joel, and she would rather spend the night here than see his face appearing through the darkness. She looked round. A light shone and flickered like a candle. Could the pack-horse track be so near, and was some one passing along it with a lantern?

She started forward again, but only to feel water ooze round her ankles. Another light shone for a moment to her right, then went out; one rose almost at her feet.

"The witch lights, the witch lights," she muttered, and sinking down upon the damp ground, she covered her eyes with her hand.

There was nothing for it but to wait till morning. She knew that by some mischance she had wandered right in among the quagmire and, as she saw the will o'-the-wisps burn here and there, she wondered that she had not been sucked down to death. She saw the glitter of her own footsteps as the night darkened, but thought they were more witch-lights shining to lure her to her doom.

Numbed with cold, frightened to move, her teeth began to chatter, and her limbs shook until they became even too cold for that sign of life. She sank into a kind of stupor, from which she started at times, thinking that she heard footsteps creeping nearer. But



it was only the marsh gas escaping with a sound like a low chuckle. She had no means of guessing the time. Often she thought that the night must be nearly past ; it had lasted so long already. When the faintest light crept over the blackness of the sky, she hailed it as the coming of day, but it was only the moon rising behind the clouds.

After that followed a period of utter prostration, in which she saw and heard nothing. She was only conscious of an ever-present horror, which did not seem to have any outward source—she had lost all knowledge of the witch-lights and the marsh.

In this state of stupor Barbara found her.

“ Lucy, Lucy,” she said, lifting the girl in her arms, and though tears came hardly to her, she sobbed with thankfulness.

Lucy was roused at the sound.

“ Save me, save me,” she cried.

“ You’re all right,” Barbara replied. “ See, I’ll carry you through the mire, and then we’ll jog along home. Great-granny will think we’re both lost, so long out at this time o’ year.”

“ It’s nearly morning, isn’t it ? ” asked the girl, clinging to her sister with both hands.

“ Bless the bairn, no ; not more than ten, at the latest.”

She carried the light form as easily as if it had been a child, and retraced her steps. By the time she had reached firmer ground, she was met by the inn-keeper and two men with lanterns. She saw Joel hovering behind them ; when she looked for him again he was gone.

She took the fainting girl to the Shepherd’s Rest, and there spent the night, while a message was sent to Mistress Lynn to reassure her of their safety.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### WINTER

SOME days passed before Lucy was well enough to leave the Shepherd's Rest. She had got a severe chill from her exposure to the night air and the vapours of the marsh, but her nature was naturally buoyant, and the relief she experienced from a quiet conscience, now that she had cut herself off from Joel, enabled her to throw off that which might have been a serious illness.

She did not see Joel again. Mally Ray was not communicative, and as no one ever met him in Cringel Forest or upon the fellside, rumour said that he had gone away.

Peter came back in less than a fortnight. He had accepted the post in London—an important one that would use all his abilities—and from this time, until the end of the year, the days were filled with the making of arrangements for their removal. The mill-house was handed over to an uncle of Peter's, who had been born there, and Lucy and her husband came to Greystones to spend the last few days with Barbara and the great-grandmother.

A thin fall of snow covered the ground, and, frost having set in with blue skies, a north wind blowing straight out of Thundergay, and clear sunlight, the eyes were dazzled by the whiteness of the dale. The beck was not yet frozen over, but it seemed to sing less clearly as it ran between its banks, where the



grass blades were encased in crystal, and the bracken stalks, pricking through the snow, glittered with jewels. But the craggy edges of the fells were black as ebony, and dark patches showed here and there upon the pastures, where the sheep had been scraping for a precarious living.

At sunset a gorgeous display of light illuminated the clear, cold world. Night lit up the intense blue of the northern sky with stars, while the west was filled with gold-dust, and the snow slopes were stained with red and saffron. Shadows lay in the hollows and clefts, and the long ridges looked violet; their savage outlines were never so noticeable as at this time of the year towards sundown.

A ruddy beam fell through the windows at Grey-stones and made a pool of light upon the floor. In the midst of it Lucy sat with her chin resting upon her hands. Mistress Lynn was propped against her pillows, and, though her face had begun to wear the almost unearthly look of extreme old age, and the eye-sockets were far sunken in her head, the eyes themselves burnt with their old sharp light.

"It's likely I shall never see you again, great-granddaughter," she said, "unless the Lord has forgotten me, lying here so long in the big bed. A hundred years is a great span for one human body to take to herself. Life grows tedious at times. Still, I've known most things worth knowing, seen most things worth seeing, aye, and had most things worth having, though you'll not believe that, my lass."

Lucy looked up from her day-dreaming for a moment, and remarked :

"You've been very kind to me lately, great-granny."

"Oh, I's smit with a sickness that takes the old



folk whiles—a kind of softening of the vitals ; with some it's the brain, with others it's the heart."

" You mustn't talk of leaving us, great-granny. Peter's promised to bring me to see you in the summer-time."

" I doubt you'll find Barbara mistress of Greystones, then."

" I wish Barbara would marry."

" She'll never marry. She sends the lads trotting before they get their noses through the door."

" I used to think, when I was a bairn, that a lord would one day ride by and carry her off. Timothy said she should have a crown."

" Timothy's brain is all froth, like a beat-up egg. He wanted me to take some of his magic messes last winter, when I had yon bad cough, but I said, ' No, no, my man, none of your pesky stuff has ever found it's way down my throat, nor ever will.' ' It'll ease your kist, Mistress Lynn,' said he. ' Thank you kindly,' said I, ' but my kist is a hundred years old, and if it's a bit stiff in the hinges we needn't wonder. Cranky bits of furniture are none the better for tinkering at.' "

" Barbara always laughed at Timothy's sooth-saying," replied Lucy ; " all the same, she often thought about it, I'm sure of that."

" You'll never get to the bed-rock of Barbara's mind," answered the old woman ; " your spade's too short, my lass, for digging there. Though the good God made you both out of the same clay, he filled you with beck-water and Barbara with red wine. Havering ! havering ! An old woman's tongue sometimes runs away. Light the candles, lass ; it's getting dark, and Peter will soon be coming in."



The candles, in their tall iron sconces, filled the kitchen with a mellow light. The colour had vanished from the fells, but the stars glittered, and the wide snowfields gave a moonlight glimmer to the landscape. Lucy stood at the window for a moment, before putting up the shutters, thinking about her great-grandmother's words. Glancing at Thundergay, she thought how far and cold it looked against the star-fringed edges of the sky. There was her sister's throne, there on the highest peak with an outlook wide but wild, where she breathed an air too clear and sharp for common mortals.

She turned to the warm kitchen, recognising, with a glow of comfort, that such was her fitting place. She did not desire a large perspective—her eyes could not have taken it in. She did not crave for communion with nature, she did not want to dip herself into the mysterious pools that lay about the path of life. A common round, enclosed within four walls, satisfied her needs. Yet she knew that her husband's mind would sometimes escape from the warm nest that she would make for him. Now and again he would leave her to climb such high places as Barbara knew. There she would not be able to follow him. Yet she would not murmur. She would make his home such that he would always return to it for rest and sympathy. Ah, yes, if she were but a vessel full of beck-water, as her great-grandmother had said, she would be able to quench his human thirst. Barbara might stir and exalt as wine did, but hers would be the more womanly office of attending to common needs.

Peter had gone to the mill-house, Barbara was in the byre, Jess's shrill voice could be heard in the yard,



and the hinds were out. Mistress Lynn seemed inclined to sleep, so Lucy returned to her seat, and stared into the fire, looking like a child making pictures there.

She was, in fact, seeing again the witch-lights and Girdlestone Pass. The place had been so impressed upon her mind, that it returned with startling vividness to haunt her, whenever her mind was unoccupied. In the warmest corner of the chimney-nook it would make her shiver; in the brightest flood of fire and candlelight she would see the rolling darkness about her feet, and then the will-o'-the-wisp gleam with its alluring, fitful flame. The horror of that time would remain with her all her life. It had killed anything that was left of her love for Joel, made her appreciate her position as Peter's wife, filled her with gratitude towards him, for he had forgiven her with the utmost gentleness. Had Joel stood before her now she would have turned from him without a tremor save that of shame.

Mistress Lynn was not asleep; like Lucy, she was thinking of the past. The years that were gone came back to her in a long, long train. From childhood, from her earliest memory, she followed events up through girlhood to wifedom and widowhood, and here at last she had come from the cradle to the four-poster, from having been a golden-haired bairn to be a bedridden old woman. It seemed hardly believable the way in which the years had gone. Yet the old clock, ticking in the corner, had marked off the moments of her existence with a relentless hand. Often it had been her solitary companion through long and wakeful nights, and she had listened to it, and watched its white face flicker with the firelight, never thinking



that it was a stern angel, telling out the passing of her years.

As she passed her life in review, she thought that she had few regrets. The last one—the failure of Joel Hart to fulfil her hopes for him—soon fell away from her mind. She was too old to trouble any more about the cross-purposes of other people's lives. Still, she would like to have seen him again. Though she would have bitterly resented had any stain been put upon her name, perhaps, at the back of her old brain, she felt that, had his grandfather asked her to flee with him, she would have gone, so great was her love—and made herself strong enough, and brave enough, to take the consequences, and never cast a look behind.

Joel Hart had not gone away. He had meant to go, day after day, but had not had the resolution to carry out his intentions. He spent the dreary time at Forest Hall in vain longings, and in reviving his hate for Peter. He did not go out, but did his best to empty his wine-cellar. At last, however, he made up his mind, and told Mally Ray that he would ride off, as he had come home, in the dusk of early morning. The night before, a restless spirit took him into the dale. He thought that he would look at it for the last time.

He wandered along, keeping to the same track as that which Lucy had taken when she went to meet him in Girdlestone Pass. He came across no one: those whose business took them to the hills managed to get it done before twilight fell, and sensible folk sat by their fires, having no inclination to wander about in the snow unless they must.

From the other side of the beck he looked at



Greystones. He saw the light suddenly shine out when Lucy lit the candles, then as suddenly disappear when she put up the shutters.

The vision roused the devil in him. Yonder was the woman he had loved, surrounded by light and warmth, while he stood out in the cold. There did not exist for him a single smiling face in the whole bleak world. Instead of bread, life had given him a stone to break his teeth upon. Did he care for her still? He did not know, but he once did, and another man had stolen her from him. That passion had become swallowed up in another. Always more or less unbalanced, he had put himself, the whole of himself, into one scale, and it went down. He had flung reason away, so had nothing left to readjust the poise. He hated Peter with all his powers.

He turned his back on Greystones, and went towards home, hugging his hate. Was he out in the cold? Passion kept him warm. It kept him more than warm—it scorched him. His very soul was on fire with the maddening flame.

The track which he was following joined the forest road just at the bridge above the falls. He paused to knock the snow from his heels, and saw, coming towards him, the figure of a man. It was Peter Fleming returning to Greystones.

Joel straightened himself. He was in no mood to weigh his actions, or control that which he felt. He had no time to consider consequences. He was like a man who, in a sudden fury, takes all that he has and flings it away, not caring, at the moment, whether it is irrevocably lost or not. Joel saw, as in a flash, what he meant to do. He meant to hurl himself upon Peter, and finish that wrestling bout, which had had



so disastrous an ending before. One or other of them should fall, and fall for ever. He would pitch Peter over the parapet of the bridge down the falls ; even if they had to go together to their death he would do it. He had told Lucy that he would drown her if she loved this man best ; that had been bluff to frighten her. Now he was in deadly earnest.

But as he drew himself together, and made ready to spring, Peter, unconscious of the implacable foe awaiting him in the shadow, paused and turned. There was a muffled sound on the forest road of some heavy creature coming quickly along.

“ I do believe it’s Big Ben,” he said to himself, and laughed.

The bear loped up, sniffing and whimpering with pleasure. It rose to its full height, laid a paw on its master’s shoulder, and licked his face like a great dog.

“ Run away from Jake, have you ? ” said Peter, pushing the beast down. “ Well, old fellow, I’m afraid you can’t come to Greystones. The cows won’t give any milk when they see you about the place. What the deuce are you growling at ? ”

This exclamation was uttered in a different tone of voice. Big Ben had scented Joel. As Jake said, the bear was a creature who had memories. With every expression of fury, it went towards him, stalking on its hind legs, showing its teeth, and waving its great hairy arms in preparation for dealing a blow such as only a bear can give.

Peter caught the chain that was dangling from its collar, and called it back, as a dusky figure dashed past him. He did not see the man’s face, but he knew the form.

In a few minutes Jake the rat-catcher came up.



“ I saw Joel Hart just now,” he said ; “ he seemed to be in a mighty hurry. Feared o’ Ben, I should think. Ben doesn’t like him. What in the world is he doing here still ? I thought he’d gone away.”

Peter, too, wondered, but he said nothing.

He gave the bear back into Jake’s charge and went on, much perplexed and troubled. He was glad that Lucy and he were going away so soon, for he could not help being suspicious that Joel had lain in wait for him with no good purpose in his mind, and, save for the arrival of Big Ben, would have made an attempt to carry it out.

But he said nothing of this to anyone.

The next morning Jake told him that Joel Hart had ridden away at dawn.

The remaining days passed quickly. Barbara was in a gentle mood. The sternness of her face relaxed, the fire in her large blue eyes was subdued to a steady glow, which fell upon her sister and Peter with the softness of serene skies. No shadow should darken these final scenes of Lucy’s life in the dales. Peter and she should depart, unsaddened by that which they were leaving behind them. Sorrow at bidding good-bye to the old woman there must be, for they were not likely to see her again, but such tears would soon be dried. Her own sorrow, her own loneliness, must be hidden.

On Christmas Eve they all gathered in the kitchen to welcome in the Christmas morning. Fresh bedding had been shaken down in the cow-house, after the good old custom of those days, so that the cattle might have clean straw to kneel on when midnight struck. Barbara had put a wisp, with an apple, a jug of water, and a platter of oatcake in an empty stall,



and, coming out, had bolted the door, for no eye might see that scene, when the Christ-child came to bless the beasts, that had shared with Him their shelter and their bed.

The beck was now frozen over and nothing could be heard outside, till from far down the dale came the voices of the waits, singing :

“ As I sat under a green-wood tree  
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day  
I saw three ships come sailing in  
On Christmas Day in the morning.

Their voices drew nearer, and Barbara went out to the garden-gate, followed by Peter.

“ I’ve got a shepherd’s privilege,” she exclaimed, with a light laugh. “ I can see angels on Thundergay.”

“ I fear they don’t bring you much good tidings, Barbara,” he said, letting some of the bitterness which he felt creep into his voice.

“ Hush,” she replied, “ listen.” They could hear the words clearly.

“ She washed his face in a silver bowl  
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day  
She combed his hair with an ivory comb  
On Christmas Day in the morning.

“ She sent him up to heaven to school,  
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day,  
She sent him up to heaven to school  
On Christmas Day in the morning.”

“ I would not have it otherwise, Peter,” said Barbara, laying her hand on his. “ You and I—we must go up to heaven to school.”

He said no more, and they went in, knowing that the first and last word, which would ever pass between them upon that which lay deepest in their hearts, had been spoken.

## CHAPTER XXV

### BARBARA COUNTS THE GOLD

AFTER many weeks of silence, the beck sang once more at the door of Greystones. The sound stole upon the ear so imperceptibly, with the slackening of the frost, that Barbara was unconscious of it, until its clear voice again filled the kitchen with its familiar song.

The hour was midnight ; a watery moon sent a faint light into the room, for the shutters were not up. A single candle burnt near the four-poster, and the fire had not been covered down for the night, after the usual custom of good housewives. The place had a waiting look as though someone was expected.

Barbara lay on the settle, covered with a sheepskin, her long limbs sunk in an attitude of repose, but her eyes were open and her ears alert.

The expected guest was death.

In spite of the moon, fire, and candle-light, shadows lurked everywhere. Barbara's recumbent figure had the uniform greyness of an effigy in stone ; the bride-wain and the clock were vague ; only the bed, with its curtains undrawn, retained any semblance of reality. Old Mistress Lynn lay high upon her pillows, her sharp, stern features lit by the candle burning beside her. She was asleep.

For some time Barbara had spent her nights upon the settle. There had come no sudden change in



her great-grandmother's condition ; she sank slowly, getting weaker and weaker as the winter passed ; and now, at the approach of spring, was slipping quietly away. Several of the village folk offered to share the girl's vigil, but their presence in the kitchen seemed to trouble the old woman, so Barbara kept watch alone.

It was a quiet time. Neither pains of body nor distresses of mind disturbed the fleeting hours of that long and imperious life. She slept much and, when she was not asleep, watched her great-granddaughter with dreamy eyes. But she rarely spoke, and though no foreshadowing of death had laid a finger upon her lips, she seemed to be too weary to utter any more of the sayings, which she had been so fond of uttering in the past. To-night she breathed regularly, although deeply.

So the moonlight and the firelight, mingling with each other into an unearthly glimmer, the shadows, and the singing beck, held the silence of the death-chamber undisturbed.

Barbara listened to the voice of the running water with varied feelings. It spoke to her of life ; of the hopes and ambitions and renunciations that had sounded such strange notes in her own soul. For its clear ripple was accompanied by sad murmurs, and sudden splashes, as it ran over pebbles, or flowed in a deep torrent, or fell from the rocks. It played upon the whole gamut of sounds, just as life had played upon the whole gamut of her emotions, and out of them made music, halting and discordant, perhaps, at times, but always striving after more perfect harmony.

Barbara had real affection for the beck. When she and Lucy were children, afraid of the dark, they used



to lie awake at night, shivering at the thought of the crags overhanging the house, but its voice reassured them. The stream was a living thing, so free, and light-hearted, and friendly. It never hid from the sun or the moon, it gathered their light into its foam. Barbara used to call it the Milky Way, and let it flow through her imagination like a galaxy of millions upon millions of stars. And it was her and her sister's delight to fly out of the house at the first peep of day, in the hot summer weather, and bathe in the clear pools above the farm, bathe naked under the green banks, with no eye but that of a distant shepherd to spy upon them.

The beck was a true friend. It piped when they danced, leaped when they sang, and mourned when they were sorrowful. To Barbara, as to her great-grandmother, it told stories of the days of old. For it had seen the midnight raids of the moss-troopers, had baffled the hounds when they came on a man-hunt up the dale, and had, more than once, had its clear waters stained with blood. But to-night it wakened more intimate memories in Barbara's mind.

She lay, soothed into drowsiness, while the events of her life passed before her like pictures upon a screen, light and dark, monotonous, or many-coloured, they came and went, and she looked at them as a painter may look at the early work of his hands, and trace in it those ideas which experience has since matured. She had not allowed herself to meditate in this way for a long time. Some of her memories had still the power to cast her weeping upon the ground. But now, whether lulled into semi-consciousness by the beck, or subdued by the near approach of death, she saw and handled, with unimpassioned feelings,



that which had been painted out of her heart's blood. It was as though she had been lifted to a higher sphere, where the inner significance of life was understood and where the crude pattern it had been worked into here, was there transformed into a thing of perfect beauty.

So the night wore away. The moon vanished, and rain came down with the rushing sound of steady pouring.

Barbara put more turf on the fire, stole across the floor, and stood looking down upon the yellow, parchment-like face, lying high upon the piled-up pillows. Then she went back to her couch. She had a feeling to-night, which she could not explain to herself, that the tale of her own days was written. Her life was becoming like the fly-leaf in a book, which lies between the end of the story and the cover—a blank, white page, where nothing more would be transcribed, no further adventure; neither new phase of thought, nor struggle of flesh and spirit. The excitements and turmoils were ended, the passions had been fought and, when that page was turned, the book would be shut. Barbara's life had been bound up with her great-grandmother's, and she could not imagine it apart from her. So blank did it appear that she had not made any plans for her future, when the masterful old woman should lie no longer in the four-poster, but have exchanged it for a narrower, colder bed.

Lucy had written to say that her sister must come and live with her, or, if she would not consent to such a plan, come for a long visit. Barbara knew that she would do neither; Peter would not expect her to, and he would understand her refusal. He and Lucy



were happy at their new home, but she must never darken it. As she had lived, a lonely shepherd lass upon the mountains, so she would continue to live, a lonelier woman, finding solace among the stern grandeur of her native land.

Worn out by her long watch, Barbara fell into a light sleep. She slept as tranquilly as a child, and, for an hour or more, the deep breathing of Mistress Lynn and her great-granddaughter was the only sound of life in the room.

Shadows moved about with the flickering firelight, and, when the candle guttered to its socket, they came and stood round the bed, like noiseless spirits, watching the figure there, which lay so still, that it looked as if it had already sunk into the quiet composure of death. Towards morning, in that cold hour before the dawn, Barbara was awakened by a voice calling her.

She flung off the sheepskin and came to the old woman's side.

"Did you speak, great-granny?" she asked.

"Aye; light the candle, Barbara."

Mistress Lynn had raised herself on her elbow, and was looking round the room with some of her former craftiness in her eyes. She noticed that the shutters were not up, and bid the girl close them.

"Come here, lass," she said.

Barbara saw that she held the key of the bridewain, as though she were afraid it might be snatched from her; she had never given up her habit of hiding it in the bed.

"Are we alone?" she asked.

"Yes. Jess is asleep upstairs."

"Who's yon sitting by the fire?"



Barbara turned round with a start.

"It's only the empty arm-chair, great-granny," she replied.

"David Lynn died in that chair!" said the old woman. "I thought I saw him just now warming his feet. He always had cold feet. 'David,' I used to say to him, 'we'll never ken when you're dead, you that's already so cold about the legs.'"

"You've had a nice sleep, great-granny. Do you feel better?"

"Better! I's well." She stretched out a lean hand, and drew the girl nearer to her. "Someone's watching us from the corner," she whispered.

"That's the clock."

"Oh, aye, the clock, the moony-faced critter! Many's the time it's given me the creeps. What time is it?"

"Four."

"Four in the morning! I hear a queer sound in the room, lass."

"It's only the rain coming down and the beck running. There's been a thaw through the night."

"Ah, that's the reason I slept so long! I's been wondering for weeks back what it was I missed. When I wakened whiles I thought I was dead, the place felt so quiet-like."

She listened with a smile on her drawn face. Then she asked once more if they were alone.

"Not a soul is near," Barbara reassured her.

Mistress Lynn leaned over the edge of the bed, and tried to insert the key in the lock of the bridewain. But she could not manage it, and fell back.

"Open it," she said.

The girl took the key, and opened the cupboard.

She knew what the old woman wanted and, bringing out the money-bags, she laid them in her lap.

The trembling hands closed over them, and for a while she lay and did not speak.

Barbara stood silently by, till a sudden suspicious look from the sunken eyes made her move away to tidy up her own disordered couch. She shook the rug, hung it over the back of the settle, and smoothed the cushion upon which her head had lain. Then a call brought her back to the four-poster. The old woman was plucking at the leather thongs to untie them.

Barbara was stirred at this strange action of the dying woman, whose thoughts should have been elsewhere than lingering round the earthly treasures which moth and rust corrupt. Yet the action did not surprise her. For she could understand the heart, which would cling to its idol to the end. She had inherited the same intensity of character. And to save herself from becoming worse than a miser gloating over his gold, she had had to cut off her right hand, and pluck out her right eye. For a lawless heart was worse than a gluttonous one, however gorgeously it might array itself in the garments of love.

Barbara untied the bags, which the useless old fingers were fumbling at, and poured out their contents upon the bed, where they lay—a heap of silver and gold coins, glistening in the light of the candle.

Mistress Lynn handled the pile lingeringly, loath to let a coin go when she had grasped it, and she seemed to draw energy out of its cold touch.

“Count it,” she said, “but count it slow, so that I can follow you. It’s a bonny sight, a bonny sight,



lass, and worth an old woman's gathering, eh? It shall be yours some day, yours and Lucy's. You'll divide it equally, Barbara, between yourself and Lucy when I'm gone. Joel Hart doesn't need his share now. I never loved Lucy much; still, she's blood of my blood, and bone of my bone. I'll deal fair by her. How much was that, Barbara? One hundred pounds! One hundred pounds! put it in this bag and tie it up tightly."

Barbara counted the money. She was not able to repress a feeling of regret when she thought of the difference it would have made to her sister's life and her own, if it had been used, instead of hoarded up in the bridewain, and only taken out at night for a bed-ridden old woman to gloat over. Now Lucy did not want it, and Barbara had no desire to possess more than her needs demanded.

The tinkle of the coins was heard in the kitchen for some time. When they were all counted they were restored to their bags, and put away. The bridewain was locked, and Mistress Lynn again hid the key in the bed beside her.

"You'll find it when I's gone, Barbara," she said, and, with a satisfied smile, shut her eyes. The exertion had tired her, but her mind was at rest, for she was dying a rich woman.

It was nearly dawn, and, though it was wet and cold, there was a feeling of spring in the air. The uplands were still white with snow, but it had begun to vanish from the dale, and green grass showed here and there, a welcome sight after the weary weeks of winter. A few venturesome birds sang in the copse.

Jess came stealing into the kitchen, wondering if death had yet snatched away the imperious spirit



from its withered body. But Mistress Lynn was asleep or unconscious, Barbara was not sure which. So the work of the day begun, which must continue, come life or death. The cows were milked, the fowls fed, and the hinds went out to look after the sheep.

But Barbara did not leave the kitchen.

The grey day passed monotonously. The song of the beck grew louder, as it was fed by the melting snows, and the cliffs behind the house ran with water. Rain poured steadily down, washing bare the fells, and streaking them with thin white lines, where the waking cataracts began to leap. Barbara brought a chair to the bedside, and sat down, her hands clasped idly on her knee. Mistress Lynn did not stir.

Barbara was alone at Greystones. Jess had gone to the village, but the girl was not afraid, although she was becoming conscious of another presence there. The personality of the old house awoke, and took form. She had often seen it before, a gaunt, grim figure—older far than the great-grandmother—whose eyes were haunted by memories, whose features were stricken by sorrow, whose cheeks were lined with the marks of a wild yet lonely life. Such was the grey spirit of Greystones. This afternoon it seemed to rise out of the flags at her feet, and stand waiting, waiting as it had waited again and again through the centuries while a Lynn died.

From each soul that passed under its roof it took the memories, the tragedies, the passions, and made them its own. There was no sorrow known to human beings that it had not suffered, no joy it had not tasted, but it tasted sparingly, for joy was not the common lot of those who slept in its shelter. No Lynn was a stranger to it or unconscious of its reality ;



it lived with each one intimately, was present at both bed and board, and linked the generations together with its worn hands, giving to the new the blessing or curse of the old.

Some had fled from it, afraid as of a ghost. Lucy had been afraid. Others, like Barbara, might shiver in its shadow, yet felt for it something which they could not justify, nor explain. But the ghost of Greystones—call it what you will—was not immortal. It must die with the fabric that was its body, and already there were signs that that body was sinking into ruin. Barbara thought of the doom which had been spoken over it long ago, spoken, no one knew by whom, but perhaps by a Lynn, who had feared its personality, that some day it would fall, and then would end the race of strenuous souls, who had inhabited it for three hundred years.

Thus these two—Barbara and the old house—watched and waited while the spirit of the great-grandmother struggled to be free, and leave for ever the place it had known for generations, which it had upheld by its own force of will, because it was determined to live there to the end. Otherwise, Greystones would have been deserted long ago, have become the home of bats and owls, till the fall of its roof-tree buried all its memories in a ruinous heap.

The day was drawing to its close, the fire had died down, and the room was dim. Dim looked the clock, dim the empty arm-chair, and the four-poster was already vanishing into night. Barbara heard a rattle on the roof, but did not heed it. She thought that the weather had changed again, and hail was falling instead of rain. The short shower died away as abruptly as it had begun.



The girl stood looking down at her great-grandmother with tears in her eyes. The loneliness of her own lot suddenly appalled her. Soon she would be left solitary in a vast, overwhelming world, with the dominant factor gone from her life, and all the ties which bound her to her fellows broken. For what had she in common with any woman in the dale but her sex? And what had she in common with the men but her height and strength? They did not understand her. The only soul which had been able to enter into her mind was slowly vanishing away from her sight.

Mixed up with her thoughts and her grief was the consciousness of a louder hail on the roof. Then earth and stones poured down the chimney, and she ran to the door.

A fear, which she had not time to put into words, got hold of her. She thought of the crags behind the house. The winter had been severe; for weeks the ground had been held in the grip of an iron frost, and, now that the thaw had come, there was likely to be some landslips in the neighbourhood. When she opened the door, she saw the hind running down the opposite fellside, waving his arms to her, but she could not hear what he was shouting for the growling, crackling noises overhead. Then a rock crashed past the house and plunged into the beck.

Barbara ran into the garden and looked up. A sound like distant thunder began to roll. She saw, as it were, the whole mountain move. Horror, for a moment, robbed her of understanding, but she recovered herself. The vast mass of Mickle Crag was heaving, and splitting apart, sending before it showers of stones and soil, while around stood the grey hills,



looking on with calm features. She must flee if she would save her life. But she could not flee, for her great-grandmother was still living.

She went back to the house, knowing that she was going to destruction. Fear did not rob her step of its firmness, nor her eyes of their steady glow. In a few seconds more, she, and the old woman, and the older house, would go down to a common grave. They who had dwelt together so long could not be separated in death. She bent over her great-grandmother and slipped her arm under the worn head.

The crash and tumble of falling rocks roused Mistress Lynn. She opened her eyes and smiled.

“Thee’s a good lass, Barbara,” she said.

And thus they died.

## EPILOGUE

IN the kirk-garth of High Fold, among the mouldering head-stones, there lies, half hidden by the matted grasses, a fallen pillar.

It is hewn out of native granite, polished to so fine a grain that even yet it looks like a piece of marble. But it has lain there for many years, and will continue to lie, unless some kindly soul, knowing its history, sets it again upon its pedestal, to defy the storms of that wild region.

The church is rarely used now, for the village has sunk into ruins. Among the roofless cottages the stonechats may be seen flitting in and out all through the long spring and summer days, and they build their nests in the whin-bushes that grow in the old house-places. The sheep come there to crop the grass, for it has a greener tinge, and tastes sweeter than that but a few steps away on the fellside ; and a great grey mountain fox once made its home in a chimney. But the Brownriggs, the Yewdales, the Idles, the Flemings—those worthy families who had lived there for many grandfathers back, as they used to say, are all gone from the old homesteads, allured by that will-o'-the-wisp which shines so brightly and persistently in the streets of our great cities, and yet rarely brings the traveller to anything better



than the peat-pots, and marsh mosses of Quaking Hag.

The change had come quickly, within two generations. It came with the power loom and the whirling of wheels, with the dying down of the old industries, and the introduction of the new, which screamed out, like a mad midwife, that they were bringing in the Golden Age.

Forty years ago, smoke could still be seen issuing from the chimneys of High Fold. The old folk left behind, used to meet at the well of a summer's morning, and gossip about the days gone by. At that time the pillar was still standing in the kirk-garth—a tall, finely-formed column resting upon a Greek pedestal, but broken off roughly across the top to show that it commemorated a life untimely ended. Travellers rarely came that way, but those who did would stop to read the words engraved upon it, and enquire further about Barbara Lynn, and ask who Peter and Lucy Fleming were, that had raised the monument to her memory.

Now moss, and the action of the weather, have partly obliterated the lettering, yet a careful hand and a sharp eye may still lay it bare. Kneeling on the grass beside it you can read this inscription :

“ Barbara Lynn died with her great-grandmother at the fall of Mickle Crag in Boar Dale. Their bodies lie buried in the Great Barrow erected over them by Nature ; their souls are free and immortal.”

Then follow the date and their ages. Barbara was only twenty-six ; her great-grandmother was one



hundred years old. Below that, Peter had caused to be engraved these words :

“ Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail,  
Or knock the breast ; no weakness, no contempt,  
Dispraise or blame, nothing but well and fair  
And what may quiet us in a death so noble.”

Often the traveller heard enough of the story to fire his mind, and he would go some little way out of his path to visit the scene of the disaster, and meditate by the Great Barrow that covered the bodies of Annas and Barbara Lynn, and hid the old house of Grey-stones under thousands of tons of earth and rocks. No attempt has ever been made to clear it away, the landslip had been complete and overwhelming, and even the tale of treasure buried there roused no ephemeral hopes in the minds of covetous persons.

This part of the dale is greatly changed since Barbara's day. Above the landslip the beck has widened out into a small lake, from which it issues in a leaping cataract, that plunges down a hundred feet into a deep pool below. This waterfall, whose thunder can be heard in Cringel Forest, has since received the name of the Lynn's Force. The copse has disappeared, not a tree now grows in the dale, save the twisted hollies, which Barbara used to clip for winter fodder for the sheep. But, if you stand on the top of the Great Barrow, you can get a more extensive view of Cringel Forest than was possible in the old days. The rising sun no longer lights up the windows of Forest Hall ; for it, too, has crumbled before the hand of time, and stands, now a gaunt ruin, open to the winds and rains. But the beech trees still spread a sweet shade over the cart road, though every winter their ranks are thinned by the storms.



Joel Hart came home to his old house shortly before his death. He had grown rich, and returned to leave his wealth to found an orphanage for fatherless children in his native land. He had never married and, in his will, gave instructions that he was to be buried in a deal coffin, no mourners were to follow it, no stone was to be erected over his grave, but it was to be made level with the ground. So, although it is well known that he lies in the kirk-garth, there is no trace of his resting-place.

The story of Barbara Lynn's life, outwardly so uneventful, but inwardly so full of passion, is still a tale often told by the winter fire in the lonely farm-houses and shepherds' cots of her own land. It has gained in incident with its passage down the century; many things that she did not do are reported of her; yet, although she thought she was not understood by her fellows, so significant and full of meaning are these additions, that her character lives again for those who have a meditative mind, a comprehending soul, and a tender heart.

Often—so it is said—the figure of a tall woman, with golden hair and blue eyes, has been seen on the hills by solitary watchers. She comes and goes with a wind in her skirts, and a lark singing over her head. These apparitions never bring trouble or sickness to the countryside, but sweet summer weather, an increase to the flocks, and abundance to the harvest.

For many years after her death Peter Fleming came to High Fold, spent a few days there, and then went away again. He lived in London and was happy, well-off, and full of honours. Sometimes alone, and sometimes with the little old man Timothy Hadwin, he visited the Great Barrow. There, with heads



uncovered, the two men who loved her best talked in low tones, or talked not at all. Once Lucy accompanied them, but she could not restrain her grief, and after that she let her husband go alone, while she remained behind contentedly with her children, keeping his home merry and bright against his return.

As time passed she came to understand Peter better, and even got an inkling of the nature of his love for her sister. But upon that subject her lips remained for ever sealed. She had everything in her life to make her happy, and she was happy. Peter and she had memories, hopes, and sorrows which no one else shared, and so they were drawn nearer together, till the tie of husband and wife was as close as it could be, and held as sacredly. So the lives of all these men and women faded away.

If ever you go to the dales and fells, reader, spare a day to visit Boar Dale, stand by Barbara Lynn's Great Barrow, and think of her. You will hear the thunder of the force beside you, and see a buzzard floating in the blue. Look at the same grey fells, whose immobile features saw the death of one of the grandest souls that ever lived. Above all, look up to Thundergay, to Barbara's rugged nurse, friend and teacher, who helped her to be strong when she might have been weak. If you go at night you will see the Northern Crown shine, and you will remember that she wore her crown and wore it royally, though it bowed her head to sorrow and to death.

But Barbara is not dead ; the good and the great never die. As Timothy Hadwin said to Peter the last time that he came to Boar Dale :

“ Her spirit is here, in the wind, in the song of the beck, in the blades of grass. But most of all, she is



here in our hearts, in your heart and mine, living in them, communing with them more closely than she did in life. The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them."

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